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ANNOUNCEMEN'



Births

UP. - on 20th December, to Jessica and Mark, a son, Parker, a brother for Phil.

FRACK, - on 20th December, to Tom and Holly, a son, Roo.

CARR. - on 20th December, to James and Victoria, a son, Kit, a brother for

LOON. - on 21st December, to Nicholas and Claire, a son, Sal.

POWER, - on 21st December, to Michael and Pepita, a son, Max.

CATER, - on 22nd December, to Ashley and Fiona, a daughter, Indy



Mr W. R. Speed and Miss H. O'Metre

The engagement is announced between William, son of Mr and Mrs Terence Speed of Bath, Somerset, and Hottle

Mr C.H. Po and Miss H. Lo

The engagement is announced between Chang, son of Chen and Chun Po of Cricklewood, London, and Hua, daughter of Jun and Kun Lo of Brentwood, Essex.



Freddie, son of Peter and Rosamund Front of Cowbridge, Wales, and Emilie, daughter of Pierre and Jayne of Montreal, Canada.

Mr H. Roun and Miss C. D'About

The engagement is announced between

Rose Bocks of Hampstead, London. Mr T.R. Dash and Miss L.E. Board

Mr J. Enn and Miss. K. Jin

Shanghai, China.

The engagement is announced between

Julian, son of Richard and Cherry Enn

The engagement is announced between

Frederick, son of Mike and Carmella

Gere of Marlow, Buckinghamshire, and Miranda, daughter of Antony and

of Woburn, Bedfordshire and Katy, daughter of Chin and Cheng Jin of

Mr F. Gere and Miss M. Bocks

The engagement is announced between Thomas, son of Timothy and the late Maureen Dash of Ashton, Cheshire, and Lisa Board, daughter of James and Megan Board of Wimbledon, London.

Mr H. Spoil and Miss J. Herr

The engagement is announced between Henry, son of Simon and Alison Spoil of Pill. Bristol, and Jacinta, daughter Rob and Liz Herr of Northumberland



Is that it?

hroughout his negotiations with the European Union, David Cameron was fatally undermined by his own lack of resolve. He was never going to recommend an 'out' vote in his referendum, as the other leaders knew. He promised a referendum three years ago, not from any great sense of conviction, but as a ploy to stop his party talking about Europe until after a general election which he half-expected to lose. Then, in May last year, he found himself with a majority — and in a position to renegotiate. But not in a position to win, and for a simple reason: the other side always knew that he'd say yes, no matter what.

Only last year he said that Britain needed a 'proper, full-on' change in terms of its engagement with the EU — a noble objective, for which there is much appetite. Britain voted for a free-trade deal in 1975 but ended up being sucked into a quasi-imperial political system. So Cameron's opportunity was clear: to fight for the deal that Britain voted for first time around, and restore the basic principle that Britain can set its own laws.

It was an achievable ambition. The EU was negotiating from a position of weakness, given that its chaotic system of government incubated a financial crisis and an immigration crisis. Manuel Valls, the prime minister of France, said recently that the European project will 'die, not in decades or years but very fast' if the EU does not control the immigration crisis (which it looks unlikely to do). So if Britain were to vote to leave, it would further destabilise an organisation fighting for survival. If they thought Mr Cameron was serious about pulling out, then 'proper, full-on' change would have been offered.

Instead, the document this week was 16 pages of bluster and caveat — all of which makes it clear that the power resides in Brussels. This is actually in defiance, rather

than support, of Mr Cameron's stated objectives. When making the case for the referendum, he said he would fight to defend a basic democratic principle: 'National parliaments are, and will remain, the true source of real democratic legitimacy and accountability.' The example he chose was a manifesto pledge: the power to reform low-wage subsidies (i.e., tax credits) so they were claimed by British citizens they were intended for, and not by migrant workers for the first four years of their stay.

The Prime Minister claimed victory by saying the four-year period was in the document. He's right. But on the strict understanding that the European Commission,

If the electorate feels that its intelligence is being insulted, a rebellion can be raised very quickly

not the House of Commons, will decide when Britain can impose four-year restrictions on benefits. What's more, the European Parliament's 751 members will be given the power to strike down his so-called 'emergency brake', or the reduction of child benefits paid overseas. Let us be clear: the draft EU deal is not a repatriation of power. It simply underlines the extent to which power has already been surrendered.

If the Scottish Parliament were told that each of its health and education laws would be subject to a veto by the House of Commons, there would be protest and talk of 'puppet government'. So the root problem of democratic legitimacy which the Prime Minister so eloquently highlighted when proposing his referendum has not been addressed.

The EU excels at pretending to change. Take its so-called 'red card': a pledge to drop draft legislation if 55 per cent of national parliaments object within 12 weeks. Given

that any EU legislation needs to be backed by a majority of member governments, this parliamentary veto would require mass rebellion on an impractical scale. As William Hague pointed out, it's a hurdle so great that 'even if the European Commission proposed the slaughter of the first-born it would be difficult to achieve such a remarkable conjunction of parliamentary votes'.

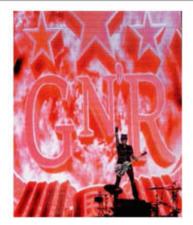
Mr Hague said that in 2008. Now there's a referendum to win, so he has stopped making such points and is now advocating an 'in' vote. A depressing trend can now be seen: honest and frank appraisals being supplanted by spin. When politicians start to talk in insultingly simplistic language, as if trying to win a vote in a caucus of primary-school children, it's a sure sign that an election campaign has begun.

The situation is made worse by the lack of parliamentary opposition. The Labour party is pro-'in'. Cabinet members who want to vote 'out' have been gagged, and will not be allowed to speak until the formal start of the campaign. Meanwhile the Prime Minister is in full campaign mode, jacket off and hijacking the lunch breaks of factory workers. He is behaving as if he is at last fighting an election campaign that he expects to win.

Mr Cameron may be encouraged by the sorry state of the 'out' campaign, described by James Forsyth on page 12. But he ought to be careful: this is not a general election, where one political army fights another. It is quite possible for the 'out' side to triumph without much in the way of political leadership. If the electorate feels that its intelligence is being insulted, a rebellion can be raised very quickly. The Prime Minister has two weeks before negotiations are finalised. He would be well advised to stay away from the campaign trail, and use this time to improve the terms of his inadequate deal.



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Why does a Conservative Prime Minister want, like apartheid South Africa, to classify people by race and, like a state socialist, to engineer the composition of free institutions?

Charles Moore, p11

One officer told me that when some migrants came aboard, their first question was 'Where can I charge my iPhone? Nigel Farndale, p20

I was not minded to laugh like an idiot during the new Dad's Army film, possibly because I was not minded to laugh at all

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CONTRIBUTORS

Freddy Gray is deputy editor of The Spectator, and was literary editor of the American Conservative in Washington DC from 2008 to 2010. He assesses the Republican race on p. 10.

Patrick Marnham is a former literary editor of this magazine and a former Paris correspondent of the Independent. He reports on François Hollande's travails on p. 18.

Philip Womack's fifth novel, The Double Axe, will be published by Alma later this year. He considers Catullus on p. 38.

Allan Mallinson is the author of The Making of the British Army: From the English Civil War to the War on Terror. He reviews a history of the battle of Culloden on p. 42.

Redmond O'Hanlon's books include Charles Darwin and In Trouble Again: A Journey between the Orinoco and the Amazon. He praises Alexander von Humboldt on p. 45



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PORTRAIT OF THE WEEK



Home

avid Cameron, the Prime Minister, made a speech in Wiltshire about a letter from Donald Tusk, the president of the European Council, on Britain's demands for renegotiating terms of its membership of the European Union. Mr Cameron said: 'What we've got is basically something I asked for.' In the House of Commons, Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the opposition, said: 'It's rather strange that the Prime Minister is not here...' instead of '... in Chippenham, paying homage to the town where I was born.' Mr Tusk proposed that in-work benefits for migrants might be subject to an 'emergency brake'. As for child benefit, this could still be sent home to children in foreign countries in the EU, but could be somehow indexed to the standard of living there. Britain would be allowed to keep suspected terrorists out of the country. 'If we get this deal in February,' Mr Cameron said, referring to a meeting of the European Council on 18-19 February, 'the government's position will be to campaign for Britain to stay in a reformed European Union.' A referendum could be held in June.

Sainsbury's increased to £1.3 billion the price of its offer to buy Home Retail Group, the owners of Argos. BP announced that its annual profits had fallen 51 per cent to £4.1 billion. Thousands of BT customers experienced temporary problems with their broadband. A Cardigan man won a case against Apple in the small claims court in Aberystwyth after his watch developed a crack. Sir Terry Wogan, the Irish-born broadcaster, died, aged 77. Religious

believers are happier than atheists, the Office for National Statistics reported.

he British Medical Association said I that junior doctors would strike for another day next week. A 58-year-old widow complained after being told she could not stay in a motor home at a holiday park at Hunstanton, Norfolk, because she was single. A family baker's shop from Newtownabbey, Co. Antrim, took to the Court of Appeal in Belfast the ruling last year that it had acted unlawfully by refusing to make a cake with icing that said 'Support gay marriage' (which is not legal in Northern Ireland). Northern Ireland's government nuclear bunker at Ballymena, Co. Antrim, went on sale, with accommodation for 235.

Abroad

ff Turkey, 37 migrants including ten children drowned in one day trying to reach Greece; two days earlier two dozen drowned, and three days later another nine. In January, 62,000 migrants entered Europe via Greece, according to the International Organisation for Migration. A survey by Greek authorities indicated that 90 per cent came from Syria, Afghanistan or Iraq. King Abdullah of Jordan said that his country was dealing with 1.4 million refugees from Syria and needed more international help. At least 71 people died in explosions near the Shia shrine of Sayyida Zeinab, south of Damascus, an attack that the Islamic State said it had perpetrated. Another 16 people had starved to death in the Syrian town of

Madaya besieged by government forces, according to Medecins Sans Frontières. A UN special envoy met a Syrian government delegation in Geneva as talks intended to bring peace began. In Stockholm, up to 100 masked men dressed in black gathered to attack immigrants. Anders Ygeman, the Swedish interior minister, said the country was ready to deport up to 80,000 asylumseekers whose applications failed. Dutch police trained eagles to intercept drones.

In the Iowa caucuses, Ted Cruz beat Donald Trump by 27.6 per cent to 24.3 per cent for the Republicans, with Marco Rubio in third place with 23.1 per cent. For the Democrats, Hillary Clinton won by 49.8 per cent to Bernie Sanders's 49.6 per cent. Alphabet, the parent company of Google, overtook Apple as the world's most valuable company, worth \$568 billion to Apple's \$535 billion. Yahoo began to cut its workforce by 15 per cent. Unemployment in the eurozone fell in December to 10.4 per cent, its lowest since September 2011; in the whole EU, unemployment was at 9 per cent.

The World Health Organisation declared the Zika virus, spread by mosquitoes and linked to microcephaly in babies, a global public health emergency. The first case of the virus being sexually transmitted in the United States was reported in Texas. Seven members of the Palestinian group Hamas died when the tunnel they were building from Gaza collapsed. In China, a crowd of nearly 100,000 gathered outside Guangzhou station as snow left travellers stranded.







DIARY Alexander Chancellor

There was a cloud over the 'Oldie of the Year' awards luncheon this week, which was the death only a few days earlier of Sir Terry Wogan. Readers of the *Oldie* must rank high among Wogan's TOGs ('Terry's Old Geezers and Gals'), as he called his fans, not only because old geezers and gals are exactly what most of us are, but above all because he was for many years the chairman of the judges of these awards and the person who presided at their annual presentation ceremony at Simpson's-in-the-Strand.

Wogan's words on these occasions

— whimsical, sardonic, affectionate

— captured perfectly the nature of old age: its mix of dignity, poignancy and absurdity. And so it was largely thanks to Wogan that the *Oldie* awards became, during Richard Ingrams's long stewardship of the magazine he created in 1992, more than just a source of innocent merriment but something rather more

— a genuine celebration of the impressive things that many people manage to do in the evening of their lives.

Since Wogan's departure in 2014, his place as chairman of the judges has been taken by the gifted and irrepressible Gyles Brandreth. As time goes on, the judging gets harder; for as people live longer and enjoy better health, there is an ever-expanding pool of oldies to choose from. Nevertheless, it still seems rather remarkable that the joint winners of this year's main award should be so old that their ages, added together, would span two centuries. They were Jeremy Hutchinson, who will be 101 in March, and Olivia de Havilland, who will be 100 in July. Altogether, 12 people won awards, and their combined ages, according to Gyles, exceeded a millennium.

Lord Hutchinson and Olivia de Havilland are still both very sprightly. The great liberal lawyer, whose case histories were recently gathered by Thomas Grant into a bestselling book and are about to be turned into a television drama, complained at the lunch about his hearing aids but otherwise showed not the least sign of decrepitude.

Since his 100th birthday last year and a memorable appearance on *Desert Island Discs*, he has re-emerged as something of a celebrity, whereas the opposite is more or less true of Olivia de Havilland, who many were surprised to find was still alive.



Having been a famous Hollywood actress from the 1930s onwards, she moved to France in the 1950s after marrying a French journalist and has lived there ever since. She is the last surviving star of *Gone With The Wind* (1939), and played Maid Marian opposite Errol Flynn in *Robin Hood*, but nothing much had been heard of her until Roger Lewis, one of our judges, tracked her down last year and offered her the award. She accepted with enthusiasm and recorded a message that was played at the ceremony.

'I am utterly delighted,' she said in a deep, sonorous voice, 'that you and your fellow judges deemed that there is sufficient snap in my celery to justify my receiving the 2016 Oldie of the Year award. It is deeply gratifying to thus find myself in the company of the Queen Mother whose record I have long wanted to match.' The Queen Mother, who died in 2002, aged 101, was awarded the title 'Oldie of the Century' the year before.

I thas become rare for anyone to turn down an *Oldie* award, but we got no response from Jeremy Corbyn when we sought to honour him for his astonishing victory in the Labour leadership election. Our emails went unanswered. Perhaps he felt that, at 66, he wasn't old enough to qualify; or perhaps he feared that acceptance of the award would expose him to mockery. On the other hand, he may just have felt he was too busy.

Busy he certainly is, but hardly busier than Aung San Suu Kyi, who on Monday inaugurated Burma's first move towards democracy when she led members of her National League for Democracy into the Burmese parliament to take their seats. Yet none of this prevented the 70-year-old Nobel peace prize winner from graciously accepting an Oldie award as 'Democrat of the Year'. Unsurprisingly, she didn't actually make it to the lunch, but she sent us the most charming letter saving how 'honoured and delighted' she was by the award. 'I must admit that I have not had much time recently to reflect on what it means to be old,' she wrote. 'I was fortunate to have been able to enjoy a retirement experience somewhat earlier than most. But after rather too many years of quiet contemplation, where my main activities were reading, listening to the radio, seeing very few friends, and barely leaving home, I am now more than happy to be back at work.'

She ends by urging oldies to visit her country (which, perhaps out of consideration for us, she calls by its old name Burma rather than Myanmar). 'You may find our roads rather bumpy, and our electricity rather temperamental at times,' she writes, 'but the veneration of age in Burmese culture will guarantee every oldie a particularly warm and generous welcome.'

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POLITICS | FREDDY GRAY

The Donald isn't dead yet

I f Donald Trump had won in Iowa on Monday night, everybody would still be saying what a brilliant candidate he is. His decision to shun that Fox News debate, just four days before the caucuses, would be seen as a tactical masterstroke. Looking at his poll lead ahead of the New Hampshire primary next week, journalists would be saying that he had effectively secured the Republican party nomination.

He didn't win, though. He came second, almost third, and now the narrative about the Trump phenomenon can be turned upside down. Trump's refusal to abide by the established rules of campaigning was foolhardy. Ducking the debate was a big mistake. The victory of Ted Cruz, the conservative 'grassroots' candidate, proved the enduring power of organised politics. And the late surge for Marco Rubio — who surprised everyone by finishing just 1 per cent behind Trump — showed that, despite all the disgruntlement among Republican voters, the party establishment can still come out on top. Trump's barmy rebellion now looks ready to collapse, and people will ask if the celebrity businessman was ever that serious about becoming president.

Before dismissing Trump's candidacy, however, it's worth examining what he has achieved. He won 24 per cent of the vote (against Cruz's 28 per cent and Rubio's 23 per cent) in Iowa, a state in which, until a few weeks ago, nobody thought he had a chance. Trump has rather sweetly spent almost \$500,000 on 'Make America Great Again' baseball hats. He appears to have spent almost nothing on boring but important activities such as canvassing or researching voter preferences, however. He has given his campaign about two-thirds of its \$19 million funds ('It's not worth it!' he tweeted this week), but that sum looks piddling compared with the \$47 million raised by Cruz or the \$112 million behind Hillary Clinton. Still, through the sheer force of his personality, and his media shock value, he almost pulled off a ridiculous victory.

Trump's campaign may well melt away — just as the Democratic populist Howard Dean's did in 2004. But bear in mind that Trump had only a seven-point poll advantage before the voting began on Monday. In New Hampshire, where the next vote will take place next week, it is 20 points. And even if the Trump bubble has popped, his campaign has exposed deep cracks in the

Republicans' power structure. Party loyalists and self-described moderates are now flocking to Rubio, who after his strong finish in Iowa looks poised to scoop the nomination. Rubio should now be able to mop up the support of the failing establishment alternatives — Jeb Bush, John Kasich and Chris Christie — and emerge as the pragmatic choice against Ted Cruz, whose hard conservatism frightens the mainstream. In a match-up against Hillary Clinton (the still-presumptive Democratic nominee, just), 44-year-old Rubio polls better than Trump or Cruz.

Rubio is far from an ideal candidate, however. The success of Trump and Cruz suggests that voters are looking for a hard man for tough times. They don't want a pretty boy who wears high-heeled boots. Rubio, a.k.a. 'The Republican Obama', has

Even if the Trump bubble has popped, his campaign has exposed deep cracks in the Republicans' power structure

for years been hyped as the Grand Old Party's coming saviour, but he has never been as popular with conservative voters as he has with the right-of-centre commentariat. As a devout Catholic (and also an ex-Mormon), he may be sufficiently pious to woo the religious. He's also aggressive enough in his foreign-policy statements to satisfy those who want to reassert America's might in the world. But as one of the 'Gang of Eight' senators who in 2013 put forward a liberal immigration reform bill, he is mistrusted. Not all Republican voters are preoccupied with keeping out Mexicans and



'It's the Chilcot advent calendar.'

Muslims, yet the fact that Rubio has subsequently 'flip-flopped' on his own proposed legislation means he is easily portrayed as lacking principle. Trump was on to something when he called Rubio 'lightweight'.

Moreover, for all his elite credentials, Rubio has got on the wrong side of a number of senior Republicans, who feel that he has jumped in front of them in the queue. The GOP establishment may be ruthless, but it rewards loyalty. Its last two presidential nominees, Mitt Romney and John McCain, were older men who had served their time. This year, the party intended to elevate Jeb Bush, who had waited so patiently to carry on where his father (the 41st president) and his brother (the 43rd) left off. Trump's insurgency tore that dynastic plan apart, leaving a path open for Rubio. Rather than accept defeat, however, Bush's allies turned on the young pretender. They spent millions on television advertisements attacking Rubio as 'just another Washington politician'. Even when it was painfully obvious that Bush's campaign was dead, elderly warhorses such as Senator Lindsey Graham pledged fealty to the Bush clan.

After Iowa, the old guard must accept Rubio as their man. But they underrate the significance of Trump and Cruz at their peril. Cruz might be an unattractive figure — he's a bit like a Texan Gordon Brown — but he is fiercely intelligent. He cleverly cultivated a 'bromance' with the poll leader in the last few months of 2015. He let Trump savage lesser opponents. Then, in the last few weeks, he attacked him for being an establishment stooge and a New York liberal.

In the last two presidential election cycles, evangelical Republicans have started brightly, only to be defeated by establishment candidates. But Cruz is more threatening to the existing order than the last two Iowa winners, Mike Huckabee and Rick Santorum.

Cruz represents the increasingly powerful and rich Republican counter-establishment. His coalition is a sprawling yet highly mobilised mass of Tea Party types, conservatives and evangelicals, who are all disillusioned with their party.

Trump's fans were also angry, albeit less ideologically driven. The question now is whether they will turn to Cruz as the anti-Washington candidate, or hop on the Rubio bandwagon. They might decide that they are better off sticking with The Donald.

THE SPECTATOR'S NOTES

Charles Moore

In 2000, the then Chancellor of the LExchequer, Gordon Brown, accused Magdalen College, Oxford, of class bias in failing to admit a student called Laura Spence, a pupil at a Tyneside comprehensive. This was grossly unfair how could the Chancellor know the details of a particular case? It was also outrageous in principle: why should a politician tell a university whom to admit? This Sunday, David Cameron did much the same thing. In the middle of his EU negotiations, the migrant crisis and the other genuinely important things the Prime Minister must deal with, he found time to offer an article to the Sunday Times, headlined 'Watch out, universities; I'm bringing the fight for equality to you'. He attacked his own university, Oxford, for admitting only 27 black men and women in 2014, and said he wants to legislate 'to place a new transparency duty on universities to publish data routinely about the people who apply to their institution... and who gets offered a place.' This 'will include a full breakdown of their gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic background'. Why? Why does a Conservative Prime Minister want, like apartheid South Africa, to classify people according to race, and, like a state socialist, to engineer the composition of free institutions? Why does he, who benefited so much from Oxford, unjustly insult it? Why does he question the motives of one of the few British institutions which the world still recognises as outstanding? What is the cultural rottenness, the mental cowardice which leads this well-educated, moderate man to assail the glories of his own country? Almost nothing depresses me more than this weird urge to foment a cultural civil war which no one needs.

L ast week, I was in the United States, where the media are even more subject to groupthink than their British equivalents. Fox News, supposedly the conservative voice, is really much more conformist than it pretends, and specialises in noisy opinion more than real news. The only person I met who got the Republican caucuses absolutely right was Chris Ruddy, founder and CEO of Newsmax, the conservative cable channel



which claims to be in '42 million US homes'. He told me he thought Cruz would beat Trump and the real winner would be Marco Rubio. So it proves. It is interesting that in a campaign in which all the candidates shout about the glories of America, Rubio is the only one who fastens on its global role: 'If America declines, there is nothing in the world to take its place.' He is right: we already see the consequences of that decline.

freedom-of-information request by A Sikhs has turned up some curious statistics from the Metropolitan Police. They show that of the more than 400 'Islamophobic hate crimes' recorded in the first half of last year, 28 per cent were not attacks on Muslims at all. They were either attacks on people thought to be Muslims (often Sikhs) or attacks classified as Islamophobic because of the absurd criteria (invented by the Macpherson Report on the death of Stephen Lawrence) which define such incidents as 'any offence which is perceived to be Islamophobic by the victim or any other person'. Muslim bodies attracting government grants obviously have an interest in there being as many such incidents as possible, so that 'perception' tends to extend well beyond reality. If we must have all these phobias, why not Sikhophobia and, indeed, Christianophobia? Collection of these numbers would lead to the arrest of a lot of Muslims, so I suppose it is ruled out as being Islamophobic.

The obituaries of George Weidenfeld, who died last week, missed his sense of humour. One of his gifts was mimicry. When he worked for the BBC during the war, he was well-known in the canteen for his uncanny ability to reproduce, in their original language and accent, the speeches of Hitler. Each week at that time, the BBC

broadcast a programme called *The Shadow of the Swastika*, which played some of Hitler's gems. George's friend Miriam Gross records that one day the expected tape of the latest oration failed to arrive. Someone remembered George's gift, got him into the studio, and made him invent and deliver a tirade by the Führer, which was broadcast as the real thing.

he firm of Weidenfeld and Nicolson was satirised as Snipcock and Tweed by Private Eye. The joke was slightly anti-Semitic, but it captured the combination which dominated English culture after the second world war. Snipcock brought the energy and intellectuality; Tweed contributed the English ironies and opened the doors. Something similar applied in many fields: the Tory party had Keith Joseph and Willie Whitelaw; the opera combined Claus Moser and Lord Drogheda. Harold Nicolson, prewar in attitude, did not like Weidenfeld's Jewishness, but his son Nigel, partly in reaction, welcomed George, and formed their publishing partnership in 1948. Nigel's son Adam tells me that Nigel was dismayed by George's 'sexual confidence' and dynamism which made him feel 'shy and hopeless', but was proud to have played his part in creating a more exciting and less insular culture. The combination worked. Nowadays, both the Snipcock and the Tweed elements in Britain have weakened, to our detriment.

he story goes that George, who was I famous for commissioning books from famous people, once said to his secretary, 'Please get me Mrs Williams on the phone.' He was put through to Shirley, who agreed to write, for a vast sum, a very dull book (I know: I have read it) called *Politics is for People*. George had commissioned her out of politeness. His secretary had got the wrong Mrs Williams. He had actually been looking for Marcia Williams (Lady Falkender), the celebrated former head of Harold Wilson's political office, who, as George well knew, was a lot spicier. She duly wrote *Downing Street in* Perspective, also for George.

Fighting over the crumbs

Cameron's EU deal is pitiful but the Eurosceptics are too divided to seize the moment

urosceptics could hardly have asked for more favourable conditions for a referendum. After barely surviving a financial crisis, the European Union has been overwhelmed by an immigration crisis — one made much worse by its failure to control its own borders. The European Commission seems determined to make itself even more unpopular in Britain, and is considering whether VAT should be levied on food and children's clothes. At a time of righteous anger at sweetheart tax deals for multinational corporations, the man who bears more responsibility for these than anyone else in Europe is its president, the former Prime Minister of Luxembourg, Jean-Claude Juncker.

Then came David Cameron's renegotiation. After months in the kitchen, Cameron has come up with the political equivalent of nouvelle cuisine: a tiny, disappointing dish served up with a big fanfare. He has nothing, for example, on the Common Agricultural Policy, or the fisheries policy that has inflicted such misery on British seaside towns. When he proposed the referendum three years ago, he spoke of a fundamental recasting of Britain's relationship with the EU. This has been abandoned. Donald Tusk, president of the EU Council, confirmed after unveiling the proposed deal that the principles of the EU would not be altered by it.

So this ought to be the moment of Eurosceptic triumph. Instead, the movement is in chaos. No national figure has emerged to make the case for leaving. There was, once, much talk of a Sir James Dyson type industrialist making the case for Britain to boldly break out on its own. But so far this has come to naught — and time is ticking by. Eurosceptics are, though, confident of securing the support of at least one cabinet minister who is not considered a usual suspect.

There are plenty of political figures involved in the 'out' campaign. But too many seem more interested in squabbling among themselves than in taking the fight to the 'in' campaign. Meanwhile the bookmakers and opinion polls give 'in' a clear lead. It has, on average, a six-point advantage and was ahead by 18 points in one recent telephone poll. These numbers are particularly dire when you consider that for the 'change proposition' in a referendum to win ('out' in this case), it normally needs to be ten points ahead before the campaign starts.

So David Cameron's famous good luck



has not yet run out. The absence of an undisputed big beast to front the campaign has made too many Eurosceptics think it ought to be them. Veterans believe that their time in the trenches entitles them to lead the charge. Those who enjoy the sound of their own voice believe that if only the country could hear them debate David Cameron on television then the scales would drop from the public's eyes.

Meanwhile, many in Ukip see the referendum as more about advancing their own

The arguments for Brexit are all there, waiting for someone persuasive to marshal them

party's interest than anything else. Nigel Farage's party has been a distinctly mixed blessing for the Eurosceptic cause. To be sure, it is capable of speaking to voters in places where traditional, sovereignty-focused Euroscepticism has little purchase. It has yoked together immigration and the EU in the public's mind. But the way it has done this has created problems. Many other respected public figures refuse to join in, or donate to, a campaign that is too Farage-dominated. Some in Ukip seem to relish this. They dream of being the Donald Trumps of British politics. Much of the tension between Douglas Carswell, Ukip's only MP, and the party leadership is

because the clique around Farage are more interested in using the referendum to boost support for Ukip at the next general election than they are in actually winning it. The theory goes that if Ukip is the only party campaigning to leave and its politicians dominate the campaign, then it could scoop up the 'out' vote at the next election — just as the SNP won the support of nearly all 'yes' voters after its defeat in the Scottish referendum.

There is an even bigger problem for the 'out' campaign though, which is that no one can picture what 'out' would look like. This is, of course, the beauty of Brexit: it would be down to Britain to decide the kind of country it wanted to be. But to up-end the status quo, a risk-averse electorate needs some sort of vision of Britain's future outside the EU.

There is no agreement about this between Eurosceptics. The disputes between policy experts as to which Brexit model is best (Norway? Switzerland? Turkey? World Trade Organisation rules?) make the debates of the early church seem easy to follow.

In the Scottish referendum, Alex Salmond ultimately lost because he couldn't give voters a reassuring picture of what independence would mean. But even he had answers, albeit of dubious plausibility. This underlines one of Euroscepticism's great strategic mistakes: to prioritise the referendum without first working out how to win it. The referendum became the focus because it was the lowest common denominator: Eurosceptics of whatever stripe could agree that the public should have their say. But it was always going to be harder to win a straight in/out vote than a referendum on an individual treaty. As the Danes, the Irish, the Dutch, and the French have all demonstrated, individual treaties can be rejected without any danger. Indeed, the EU often comes back with concessions afterwards. But an in/out vote seems a different matter, a binary choice. That's why the arch-Europhile Peter Mandelson has been so keen on an in/out vote for so long. (One suspects, though, that Brussels would return almost immediately with a slew of concessions if Britain did vote to leave in this referendum.)

Since Cameron returned to office, Eurosceptics have concentrated their energies on pressuring him to let his ministers campaign for 'out'. The hope was that this would lead to a flood of cabinet members doing so. Instead, it has been a trickle — and Downing Street radiates confidence that only four

or five members of the cabinet will ultimately go against the Prime Minister: Iain Duncan Smith, Chris Grayling, Theresa Villiers, John Whittingdale and Priti Patel. Theresa May, who would have been the biggest cabinet catch for 'out', has indicated that she will back staying in, and in the struggle between Michael Gove's Eurosceptic convictions and his personal dislike of upsetting Cameron and Osborne, the latter is currently on top.

In the end, the suspension of collective responsibility has actually helped Cameron. He can pretend he's been broad-minded while stopping the other lot from campaigning, because the ministers' licence to disagree only begins once the deal has been signed off at the EU Council in two weeks. Between now and then, the Prime Minister will be busy selling his deal to the public and getting FTSE chief executives to back it.

E ven when ministers are freed to campaign, they will be constrained by the fact that they are still members of the government. One cabinet member, an 'out'-er, is mulling a code of conduct for ministers: no debating each other directly, no impugning of the Prime Minister's integrity and no personal attacks. This 'play nicely' manifesto will make it that much easier to put the Tory party back together again after the referendum. But, as another cabinet 'out'-er complains, it would also mean that Cameron's side could keep many sceptics off the air just by putting up a minister themselves.

The Prime Minister should enjoy his position of relative power while it still lasts. Should Britain vote to remain in the EU, its position in Brussels will be far weaker. Gone will be the leverage that came from the sense that this country was only ever a summit or two from storming out. No longer will British prime ministers be able to object to proposals by saying that their Eurosceptic electorate simply won't wear it. Come off it, EU leaders and Eurocrats will say: your country has just voted to stay in the EU, warts and all. Britain's bluff will have been called.

Compounding this problem will be that the rest of Europe will feel that Britain owes it one — that they have helped Cameron out with his little local difficulty and now want something in return. Already, ministers in other EU governments are planning to call in some favours. One has already made clear to *The Spectator* that once this referendum is done, Britain will be expected to take in our 'share' of the hundreds of thousands of refugees waiting to be settled in Europe.

The renegotiation has laid bare just how much sovereignty has already been handed over. It was hard not to feel one's hackles rising as Cameron crisscrossed Europe trying to get permission for his welfare changes. Do we really want the Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orban, who holds distinctly unsavoury views, deciding what Britain can and cannot do with its benefits system? The renegotiation

Breaking

Was everybody scared? Mum was, certainly. Slip-clinging hold, respectability. World-lost, he didn't care,

Or didn't cotton on.
Inexplicably,
He once broke out, performing memorably:
Reckless, and with aplomb.

Mistiming exquisite; Turning their stomachs; Master-class for me in how to flummox Guests: it was *The Visit*.

Scented and Sunday-clad,

– Teacups four-high, stacked,

And then paraded like a circus act –

Mother pronounced him mad.

Kitchen philosophy,
The moment passed.
The next time tumbled everything amassed;
Her judgment, prophecy.

— Paul Collier

leaves untouched many of the EU policies that have done the most harm. The Common Agricultural Policy is not only inefficient but immoral, hurting farmers in some of the poorest countries in the world. The EU financial merry-go-round is still intact, too. Britain will still send money to the EU, only for Brussels to then send some of it back to this country's poorest regions.

The paucity of the case for staying in is illustrated by the quality of some of the arguments that the 'in' campaign has been making in recent weeks. They reflect a bread-and-circuses mentality that would make a Roman

'You are not going to school dressed like that!'

aedile blush. We have been told that the quality of Premier League football would decline if we left the EU because European players wouldn't be able to get work permits and that we will only be able to watch iPlayer abroad if we stay in the EU. More seriously, voters have been told that the average consumer saves £450 a year because of the EU — a claim that can be sourced to an American study of how prices have been kept down by globalisation.

The arguments for Brexit are all there, waiting for someone persuasive to marshal them. Events could also intervene. Cameron and Osborne are so keen to get this vote over as soon as possible because both know how volatile the situation is. A repeat of last summer's migrant crisis, another 'Cologne' or the eurozone going to the brink again could sway public opinion towards quitting the EU.

Yet at the moment Britain is sleepwalking into an ever more centralised EU, and the painful truth is that Euroscepticism is not ready for the confrontation that it has so long agitated for. With the government intent on a June referendum, the 'out' campaign will have a few months to do the work of years. If it cannot do that, then Britain will stay in the European Union. More than that, voters will have ratified the transformation from the European Economic Community that we joined in 1973 to the imperial institution that the European Union is today.

The bad book

Why has a hatchet job on the Church of England suddenly been pulled from publication?

DAMIAN THOMPSON

has been one of the Church of England has been one of the most astonishing trends in modern Britain. The pews of churches in this country are emptying at the rate of about 10,000 parishioners a week. Next week, a book was to be published about this collapse entitled *That Was The Church That Was: How the Church of England Lost the English People.* But suddenly the publishers, Bloomsbury, decided to pull it. The book, it seemed, was a little too incendiary.

Those reviewing the book received a panicky message: 'Following the receipt of a legal complaint, Bloomsbury are recalling all review copies of this book and ask you to *immediately* return the copy received...'. Apparently there has been a legal action because of 'a disputed passage about a Christian leader'. It sounded intriguing. But which leader? I have a finished copy of the book in front of me, and it's hard to guess.

Is it the bishop who, we're informed, 'turned out to have had a conviction for cottaging hushed up'? Or the bishop who was the subject of an 'entirely false' rumour that he 'attended gay orgies'? Or the bishop accused of faking his academic qualifications, also described as an 'entirely false' claim? It may be none of the above. We learn something extraordinary (and, perhaps, defamatory) about a member of the Church of England hierarchy on virtually every page. Ostensibly an account of the Church of England's decline over the past 30 years, the book reads more like a compendium of its most malicious gossip.

I speak with some experience. In the early 1990s, as religious affairs correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, I wrote some awfully spiteful stuff. I wince when I read it today. But even I could not reach the sadistic heights of *That Was The Church That Was*. The authors are Linda Woodhead, a sociologist of religion, and Andrew Brown, who writes about religion for the *Guardian*. He lived in Sweden for some years, and parts of this book are as nasty as any Scandinavian thriller

The best thing in the book is its portrait of Rowan Williams. The former Archbishop of Canterbury emerges as a high-church Welsh mystic who felt more at home in Narnia than in England, where village fetes were more sacred than Holy Communion. We read that he 'had no glib answers to the problems of human tragedy and suffering' — or to any problem, for that matter. He expected his bishops to 'worry at the truth like patient followers of Wittgenstein'. Instead, they kicked him around because they knew he could be bullied.

That became clear when, having encouraged his celibate gay friend Canon Jeffrey John to accept the post of Bishop of Reading, he then forced him to withdraw his acceptance in order to placate homophobic African bishops. The book quotes an anonymous bishop, who says the Primate of All England fell into a deep depression because

Ostensibly an account of the Church of England's decline, it reads like a compendium of malicious gossip

he couldn't reconcile this with his self-image as a saint and scholar: 'He couldn't be a shit — and yet he had been one.'

The mischievous treatment of Anglican politics in the style of Hunter S. Thompson's Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail is surely the work of Brown rather than the plodding Woodhead. The problem is that, frequently, mischief turns into malice. We're informed that the late Sir Derek Pattinson, for many years secretary general of the General Synod, 'once took a woman journalist to a leather bar for an interview'. This may or may not be true. I won't take the book's word for it, because when it covers the one



'Or, as I like to call it, Benefits Street.'

gay Anglican scandal I do know about, important details are wrong.

In 1989, my friend Canon Brian Brindley, the grandly eccentric vicar of Holy Trinity, Reading, was secretly tape-recorded fantasising about boys by the *News of the World*. The recordings were made in his vicarage — not the Athenaeum Club, as the book claims. Brindley inevitably lost his job. As a result of his harsh treatment by the authorities, we learn, the unnamed right-wing Catholic religious correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, 'also gay', came to 'loathe' the Church of England.

That's news to me (and it is me they are talking about). I didn't loathe the C of E and was touched by the support Brian received from senior clergy after his disgrace. As for the gay thing, it was Brown who casually 'outed' me many years ago.

But if you have a creepy obsession with closeted gays, you really need to get your facts right. A little example: Brian Brindley famously dropped dead in the middle of a dinner party to celebrate his 70th birthday in 2001. 'All the guests were male and — Andrew was told by one of them — all gay,' says the book. I was there and they weren't.

The book blames many of the problems of the Church of England on the 'managerial voodoo' introduced by George Carey. 'Like a cargo cult, [the Church] assumed that if you aped the jargon and waved some of the symbols, success and prestige must naturally follow,' we're told.

I don't know which author came up with this silly analogy, but the more theoretical passages are the work of Linda Woodhead and, it must be said, embarrassingly incoherent. Her academic eminence has always been a bit of mystery. According to her Wikipedia entry, it has been acquired 'without earning a postgraduate academic qualification'.

That Was The Church That Was tells us something important about English Christianity, but not what the authors imagine. It is the sort of scandal-obsessed diatribe that dying religious communities — one thinks of the Catholic Church in Italy or Ireland — are too weak and compromised to fend off. For the time being, the Church of England is being protected from this atrocious book by somebody's lawyers. But for how long?



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RADICAL COMMON SENSE

ROD LIDDLE

What fun it will be if Trump becomes president



suppose spite and schadenfreude are thinnish reasons, intellectually, for wishing Donald Trump to become the next American president (and preferably with Sarah Palin, or someone similarly doolally, as veep). But they are also atavistically compelling reasons nonetheless. Think of the awful, awful people who would be outraged and offended.

If you recall, 8 May last year was awash with the bitter tears of lefties who couldn't believe the British people had been so stupid as to elect a Conservative government. There were the usual hilarious temper tantrums and hissy fits. Typical of these was an idiotic college lecturer called Rebecca Roache who loftily announced that she had gone through all of her Facebook contacts and 'unfriended' any who might be Conservatives for their 'abhorrent views'. But there were thousands of others, besides Becca, stamping their little feet and daubing 'Tory scum' on war memorials. One columnist said she kept breaking down and weeping, unable to believe how thick or vile the electorate must be. Oh, how we laughed. If Trump wins, it will be like that, times ten. It will be Trumpageddon for all the worst people in the country.

The BBC, for example, will not be happy. There will be a markedly different mood within the corporation this election night to the one we witnessed in 2008, when the studios were awash with ejaculate and we viewers were all forced to endure a relentlessly celebratory Obamathon, utterly devoid of anything even approaching impartiality: how wonderful of the Americans to elect him and what a marvellous, marvellous little black man he is! They will be instead grim-faced with incomprehension and antipathy.

I doubt too that President Trump will be bunged a Nobel peace prize within a few months of taking office — because his electoral success will offend all the metro-liberals in the world and they will all start talking about the patent legitimacy of taking 'direct action', which is the only recourse when a population proves itself to be so dumb in the polling booth. Think how grossly offended will be those half a million quasi-Stalinist Brits who signed a petition demanding that Donald Trump be banned for ever from visiting this country. And the fatuous MPs who took the suggestion so seriously that they

debated the issue themselves. We cannot possibly allow into our country people who disagree with our views, even if it is a view (regarding Muslim immigration) with which the majority of the population would concur.

Think, too, of what the Guardian will have to say the morning after he's elected. Think of the furious and deranged columnists now in full agreement with Jezza that we should leave Nato and maybe cut off diplomatic relations and at the very least stamp and shout and scream with rage. Think of Newsnight, whose editor, when he was at the Guardian—the print version of the programme—urged readers and leftic celebs in 2004 to bombard the voters of the swing state Ohio with letters pleading with them not to vote for George

If Trump wins, it will be Trumpageddon for all the worst people in the country

W. Bush — a strategy which provoked derision and outright hilarity from Cincinnati to Cleveland and helped to ensure Ohio went for Dubya by a mile.

Think of the *Newsnight* post-election edition once Trump has won: Kirsty Wark and four sobbing women panellists deciding that this is the end of the world as we know it, and no, we don't feel fine.

And that phrase reminds me — think of the bien-pensant slebs, the actors and the luvvies and the pop stars. Think how royally pissed off they will be. Benedict Cumberbatch will deliver an emotional denunciation in the middle of Hamlet's third soliloguy,



'Bloody inflation!'

perhaps joined on stage by Emma Thompson, Stephen Fry, the 'comedian' Stewart Lee, Lenny Henry and many others, to hold hands and keen for the millions who will be murdered, maimed or simply excluded by the Trump presidency.

And the pop stars. It is not just the effete Georgia indie heroes REM who have it in for Trump. Our own homegrown purveyor of blue-eyed cod-soul middle-of the-road overproduced slush, Adele, has demanded that Trump stop using her terrible song 'Rolling in the Deep' before his conventions. He has no right to use my song without my permission, she said. Yes he has. But in future, when he uses it, he should dub out your voice, Adele, and replace it with someone imitating Pinky or Perky. It'll sound better that way.

The same goes for Steve Tyler, frontman of drug-addled Rolling Stones wannabes Aerosmith, who has demanded that Trump stop using his horrible power ballad 'Dream On'. I admit it would be better by far if Trump used 'Dude Looks like a Lady' — but, Stevie, US heavy-metal bands tend to be right of centre. Get with the programme.

And then - it grieves me to say this there's Neil Young. He objected to Trump using his clever and ironic anthem 'Rockin' in the Free World'. The genuinely talented Canadian has announced that he will be supporting leftie Democrat Bernie Sanders for president. Perhaps this is just a fan speaking, but I suspect that's all because Neil wants to impress the splashtastic leftie ecoloon actress Daryl Hannah, with whom he is currently shacked up. They spend their time fighting for the rights of red Indians, or whatever we're meant to call them, and opposing drilling in places where beavers live. Someone please tell Daryl that Neil was for Reagan in 1980 and Ross Perot in 1992 and that, in general, his politics are as idiosyncratic as his music. Almost his entire mid-1980s output would enrage liberals — and that's before we consider the, uh, counterintuitive feminist statement 'A Man Needs a Maid'.

So, all those people to enrage. The people who do not believe that it is even remotely legitimate to have a view which differs from their own. The more I think of it, the more attractive a Trump win becomes. I may write some letters to the voters of New Hampshire.

BAROMETER

Ballots drawn

Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders tossed a coin to decide which of them was the winner in some precincts of Iowa. What would we do if we had a tied election?

- The closest British election in modern times was the council election in Bury, Greater Manchester, in 2011. With Labour needing one more seat to take control of the council, the Labour and Conservative candidates in the ward of Ramsbottom were found to be tied. They drew straws, the longer of which went to the Labour candidate, Joanne Columbine.
- The closest recent parliamentary election was that in Winchester in 1997, where Liberal Democrat Mark Oaten won by two votes. His Conservative opponent, Gerry Malone, had the result declared void on the grounds that some ballot papers had been unstamped, but lost the subsequent by-election by 21,556 votes.

High tee

Members of Wentworth Golf Club in Surrey threatened legal action over plans by its new Chinese owners to double its fees to £16,000 a year, and to charge a oneoff joining fee of £100,000. Would it be the world's most expensive golf club?

Cost of membership over five years
Singapore Island Country Club £26,800
Fancourt, South Africa £40,000
Trump National, Los Angeles £124,000
Bear's Club, Florida £129,000
Wentworth £180,000
Liberty National, New Jersey £240,000
Source: golfmagic.com

Race for admission

David Cameron attacked Oxford University for supposed racial bias. Which ethnic groups had the highest success rate of applications between 2012 and 2014?

No. of a	applications % i	accepted
26,500	0 White	26%
180	Mixed: white/black African	n 26%
938	Mixed: white/Asian	25%
5	Gipsy/traveller	20%
194	White/black Caribbean	18%
660	Chinese	17%
	Indian	
215	Bangladeshi	9 %
	Pakistani	
Source:	Oxford University	

Final demands

How many people file their taxes on time?

— In 2014, HMRC reported that of

10.7 million returns, 93.4% were returned by the 31 January deadline.

— Of these, 570,000 (5.3%) were filed on 31 January itself, with 21,000 (0.2%) arriving between 11 p.m. and midnight.

Hollande's own emergency

His response to the Paris terror attacks has left the French president increasingly isolated and unpopular

PATRICK MARNHAM

he terrorist attacks of 13 November have had an enduring effect on people living in Paris and France's other big cities. Hotel bookings and restaurant reservations are down, and some people will no longer go out in the evening. There have been several other minor terrorist outrages across the country since November, and tension — prompted by repeated government warnings — remains high. The campaign for the 2017 presidential elections will start in July, but François Hollande's popularity, which soared after the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks a year ago, has been sliding again.

Hollande's polls rose slightly after he declared a state of emergency on 14 November. During a state of emergency, the French government assumes fearsome powers that are normally only exercised in time of war. It can suspend daily life without the usual legal authority. In the interests of public safety, a minister can, without justifying

During a state of emergency, the French government assumes fearsome powers

his decision, ban meetings and demonstrations, search private property, close business premises, impose a curfew and even order house arrests. The period of emergency has just been extended and is now due to last until the end of May.

This decision is not universally popular, although it has general public support. It has been strongly opposed by the political left and is due to be debated next week in the National Assembly. Leading the protests is France's Human Rights League (Ligue des Droits de l'Homme, or LDH) which argues that the extension is unjustified on security grounds and that it is a political move intended to pre-empt criticism of the government in the case of further attacks. The LDH petition has been signed by more than 400 university teachers, by many law professors, by one of the police unions and by the judges' union.

The growing opposition to the state of emergency is only one of the problems faced by Hollande and his prime minister Manuel Valls as they struggle against Islamist terrorism. And the curious thing is that most of the criticism is not coming from their political opponents but from their own supporters.

In another anti-terrorist move, President Hollande decided at the end of last year to introduce a law that would enable him to strip anyone convicted of terrorist offences of their French nationality, provided they had a second nationality to protect them from becoming stateless. Anyone who commits an act of terrorism against France excludes himself from the *pacte républicain*, according to prime minister Valls. This idea, known as *la déchéance*, was originally thought up by leaders of the official opposition party — the Republicans, under ex-president Nicolas Sarkozy — and was warmly supported by the far-right Front National.

In an atmosphere where even government supporters are demanding more 'order', 'authority' and 'repression' - and some are even demanding the reintroduction of the death penalty - Mr Hollande was hoping he would wrongfoot his opponents and demonstrate his determination to protect the people of France. Unfortunately for the president, such a law requires an amendment to the constitution of the Fifth Republic — and constitutional amendments require a majority in both the National Assembly and in the Senate. Since many members of his own Socialist majority in the Assembly once again oppose the amendment, the president can only get this bill passed with the support of the opposition.

Just before Christmas, the last remaining influential left-winger in the government, the minister of justice, Christiane Taubira, who was an outspoken opponent



'The whole film just stank of whitesploitation to me'

of *la déchéance*, announced that the president was ready to drop the idea. This news delighted many on the left, but was promptly denied by a government spokesman. Last week Madame Taubira finally resigned. It had become obvious that she had lost an arm-wrestling match with the prime minister and that her influence over the president was at an end.

Her departure left Mr Hollande isolated within his own party and his left-wing members counting the days to electoral defeat. Madame Taubira has now published a closely argued pamphlet setting out her objections to the constitutional amendment in corrosive terms as 'an empty symbol' that breaches the principle of *égalité*, creating two classes of citizens and two classes of terrorists. She can now be expected to lead the Socialist opposition to an amendment that will be proposed by the prime minister.

But that is not the end of the problems faced by the increasingly unpopular Manuel Valls. He has also managed to fall out with an entirely different constituency in the grand coalition that makes up the French left. Before he became prime minister, Mr Valls was, among other things, the mayor of Évry, a new town 15 miles to the south of Paris. In that role he was one of the most ferocious critics of the Muslim 'head-



Product recall

scarf', which he banned not only in schools but in any public place and even for mothers taking part in school outings. His hardline attitude stemmed from his personal commitment to *la laïcité* (secularism), the principle of total separation between church and state.

Last month Mr Valls publicly rebuked the country's chief secularist, Jean-Louis Bianco, for not being fully committed to the cause. Mr Bianco, who is the president of the 'Secular Observatory', an umbrella organisation that keeps watch over the movement's interests, had supposedly blotted his copybook by agreeing to join religious leaders in a public appeal for mutual understanding and tolerance. Mr Bianco, an ex-minister

who was the highly influential secretarygeneral at the Elysée under President Mitterrand, does not have a very high opinion of Mr Valls and issued a furious rebuke in his turn, accusing the prime minister of supporting a small group of 'secular fundamentalists' who threaten civil harmony and undermine his own attempts to strengthen national unity by building bridges between long-standing opponents.

The battle between secularists and their religious opponents in France breaks out at regular intervals and usually involves education. Its extension into the area of national security is potentially very dangerous. Now the squabble between secularists has revealed serious cracks in one of the pillars of the country's unwritten social contract. The fanatical intolerance shown by Mr Bianco's humanist critics recalls the revolutionary slogan of 1792, 'Be my Brother, or I kill thee!' — and shows that some of the pharisaical spirit of the *Enragés* and the Committee of Public Safety lives on.

But with the Islamic community facing a sharp increase in racist incidents, and the chief rabbi of Marseilles advising his congregation not to wear their skull caps in the street, all that 'secular fundamentalism' seems to have achieved to date is to unite Catholic, Jewish and Islamic leaders in a new alliance against a common enemy.

Roland Collins

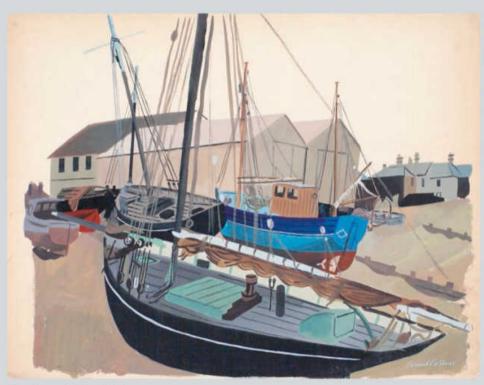
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Inside the new Navy

Life on board a warship in the era of defence cuts

NIGEL FARNDALE

he Royal Navy is known as the Senior Service because of its illustrious history; Francis Drake and all that. But the days when it ruled the waves have long gone. In 1945 it had almost 900 warships and a million men. By the time of the Falklands War it was down to 70 warships and 70,000 men. Now it is less than half that, with more admirals than there are fighting ships.

The arrival this year of HMS *Queen Elizabeth*, the much-heralded new aircraft carrier that has cost £6 billion (for 50-odd years of life), will draw unwelcome attention to the Navy's significant manpower shortages. As one senior officer put it, the carrier will bring 'new challenges, relearning old tricks perhaps, and some new — not least how to man it'. They put a brave face on things, as you would expect. But what is morale really like in the Royal Navy?

To find out, I joined HMS *Bulwark* on manoeuvres in the Mediterranean for a few days. I was given unprecedented access — I went up in a £100 million submarine-hunting Merlin helicopter, and out at night with Royal Marine commandos in one of the ship's four giant assault landing craft. Most edifying of all, I got the chance to talk candidly with everyone from the stokers in the engine room to a visiting commodore over dinner in the captain's cabin. I also found myself taking part in a 'man overboard' drill.

They still refer to a 'man overboard' even though 10 per cent of the crew are now women — including, incidentally, the 'helmsman' in the rescue boat. There was some resistance to the introduction of women to frontline duties back in 1990. But now no one notices. The wardrooms are unisex, and women do the jobs men do.

Doing the rounds of the ship is a DVD of Sailor, the 1970s BBC TV documentary set on HMS Ark Royal. Officers are amazed at scenes showing porn mags lying around the wardrooms. That wouldn't happen today. They are intrigued that all the officers speak in public-school accents, which is no longer the case. But what surprises them most is how not much else has changed, especially in terms of the 'Jack speak' (as in Jolly Jack Tar). The paymaster is still 'the pusser', your bunk is still your 'grot' and even some now very un-PC terms survive, such as 'gollies' (naval intelligence officers). They still toast the

Queen sitting down, and the toast to Nelson on Trafalgar Day is still 'The Immortal Memory', followed by silence.

But the captain told me other traditions are being lost to political correctness. The daily toast 'To our wives and sweethearts; may they never meet' has recently been replaced by 'To our families', which he thinks 'lacks humour, somewhat'. He also rues the recent changing of traditional senior titles, such as 'flag officers' to 'assistant chiefs of naval staff', which he thinks has less gravitas and 'tone'; something about which the Royal Navy has traditionally cared deeply.

In other areas, the language has changed with the times. When I sat in on briefings, I understood about 20 per cent of what was being said because the Navy speaks in acro-

The daily toast 'To our wives and sweethearts; may they never meet' has been replaced by 'To our families'

nyms. When the captain wanted to pass on congratulations to the company on the way they conducted themselves on shore, for example, he said: 'BZs all round.' It stands for Bravo Zulu and means 'Well done'.

Another surprisingly modern departure from traditional Navy decorum and reserve (think Noël Coward in *In Which We Serve*) is the way the service is slightly obsessed with Twitter. It has two million followers, which is pretty impressive, but still.

Down in the engine room, I encountered some disaffection. None of the stokers on *Bulwark* are planning to leave, but elsewhere in the Navy they are disappearing in droves, partly because of the 2010 Strategic Defence Review. The RN agreed to far too many cuts,



'They're motivational speakers.'

some 6,000 sailors, only to find they are now 3,000 to 4,000 men (and women) short. Turmoil in the Middle East and Russia's aggression everywhere — Putin is no slouch at getting propaganda images of his warships firing cruise missiles at Syria on to the news — have since forced the government to take the threats to Britain's national security more seriously.

Even so, after the defence review last November, the Royal Navy was underwhelmed by the allocation of a mere 450 extra sailors to make up the shortfall. They have been told they will have to find the rest by transferring sailors from other ships, which means longer deployments.

The RN will even have to recruit sailors from foreign navies to fill gaps in specialist engineering. And lately the Admiralty has been busy writing to former stokers now in Civvy Street, asking if they will consider returning. There haven't been many takers, not least because they get paid so much more in civilian jobs, and life at sea is so hard. They sleep in cramped conditions, three bunks high, and rarely see daylight because there are no windows on the ship, apart from on the bridge. 'If it's steak for dinner it must be Saturday,' one said to me. Another complained: 'We're in a lower pay-band than the stewards, and all they do is fluff up officers' pillows.' He added: 'In the past the main incentive to do this job for 22 years was the pension, but now that has been cut to a quarter of what it was.'

Last summer, *Bulwark* was a familiar sight on TV as it rescued thousands of migrants from overcrowded boats off the coast of Libya. Though all the crew members I talked to found this humanitarian mission rewarding, the reality was less heartwarming than the news footage suggested. One officer told me that when they came on board, the first question some migrants asked was: 'Where can I charge my iPhone?' And the stench was terrible, with the dozen or so Portaloos in the hold unable to cope.

Parliament has soon to decide whether or not to build four replacement Trident submarines. The move has majority public support, but Jeremy Corbyn and Nicola Sturgeon oppose it, so the subject will be hotly debated. In the cabinet room at No. 10, meanwhile, there is now a model of the *Queen Elizabeth*, a daily reminder to the PM of what a useful asset he will soon have at his disposal, both as 'hard power' and 'soft'. (Russian envoys can expect a few invitations to cocktails on board.)

So, with all this duality of purpose, is the Royal Navy's identity crisis set to deepen? When I asked Captain Nick Cooke-Priest, shortly before we sailed into harbour at Malta, he dismissed the idea, 'because one of our primary functions is to protect the seaways that underpin the nation's economy, and that hasn't changed.' He did concede that 'We do need to get some equilibrium back, after years of managed decline.'

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A lesson in self-censorship

Surviving as a Tory teacher means keeping quiet

JOE BARON

ccording to my former colleagues, history teachers in an urban English state school, anyone who votes for the Conservative party is 'thick', the British Empire was 'unambiguously evil' and capitalism leads to 'mass inequality and misery for the vast majority of working people'. The only answer was, you guessed it, socialism. Yes, the cliché of the Little Red Bookcarrying schoolteacher is alive and well.

As the only right-of-centre teacher in the history department, I found lunchtime particularly galling. My colleagues would sit around denouncing the British empire, Michael Gove's changes to the national curriculum and the government's 'ideologically driven' attempts to cut the nation's deficit. But what worried me more was their willingness to indoctrinate their pupils with the same world-view. On one occasion, I overheard three of them discussing the delivery of a unit provocatively titled 'Should we be proud of the British empire?' As you can probably imagine, there was one answer they considered right: 'No! We should be ashamed. Look at Amritsar, what we did to the Native American Indians and our involvement in the Middle East,' said one, shaking his head.

In history class, pupils discussed a litany of British atrocities, from forcing widespread opium addiction upon a benighted, infantilised Chinese population to massacres in India and Africa and ethnic cleansing in North America and Australia. There was only one task asking pupils to consider the question: 'How did the British Empire improve lives?' and this was homework. There was no classroom discussion about the spread of capitalism, parliamentary democracy and the rule of law; the propagation of ideas, literature, technological and medical advances; or even the abolition of the slave trade.

Mostly, on this subject, I held my tongue. I was a supply teacher on a zero-hours contract and was worried about being sacked.

If only I had stuck to this resolution. After keeping schtum for two months, I finally challenged a colleague's view of the Tories. 'Why are Tory voters thick?' I asked. 'Is it just because they happen to disagree with you?'

'No,' he replied. 'Because they voted for cuts'.

'Perhaps they saw the cuts as necessary,' I said. 'Surely it's better to make savings now, rather than keep spending money we

don't have, go bankrupt and, like the Labour government of 1976, be forced to make even deeper cuts after going cap in hand to the IMF?

'That's rubbish!' said another colleague. And so it continued, though no one actually raised their voices, until they brushed off my argument with a blasé 'yeah, yeah, yeah' before gesturing towards the office door as if dismissing a recalcitrant child.

Two days later, I defended the new national curriculum and the government's commitment to traditional teaching methods against the head of department's venomous and sustained criticism.

I said, we do too much for the children we teach; we should give them more responsibility and more freedom to think independent-

For a brief moment, I deluded myself into believing that schools encouraged the questioning of orthodoxies

ly. She said: 'I don't want to talk to you any more!' Before leaving — I had to go to my lesson — I asked why she was being so rude. 'It's only a debate,' I said. 'Isn't it a good idea to listen to the views of others, even if you find them hard to stomach?'

My answer came on Friday — two days later. I was called into the head's office and told that, after a complaint from colleagues in my department, the school would no longer require my services. So I was effectively being dismissed for holding the wrong views, though of course the head dressed it up in a different garb: it was my manner rather than my opinions. Apparently I was 'too assertive'.

As I remember it, my interlocutors were both red-faced and angry, and more than willing to use inflammatory language. I was told, at one point, that I was unfit to teach.

Interestingly, the head of department who refused to work with me — effectively calling for my dismissal — had several weeks previously decried the cruelty of zero-hours contracts. Where was her left-wing compassion when it came to sacking me, a married man with two children to support?

I suppose I've only got myself to blame. For a brief moment, I deluded myself into believing that schools actually encouraged tolerance and the questioning of orthodoxies through intellectual exploration, freedom of thought and speech. How silly of me.

ANCIENT AND MODERN

In defence of discrimination



David Cameron

has accused universities of being xenophobic, racist and prejudiced against the poor. He is too much of a coward actually to say that, of course: instead, he said they 'discriminated'. That is a weasel word these days, and it is worth tiptoeing gingerly on to Mrs Wordsworth's territory to see what Cameron is missing.

'Discriminate' derives from the Latin discerno, 'I separate or divide off spatially; I distinguish mentally or practically'. The noun discrimen could mean anything from 'a parting in the hair' and 'a point in which things differ' to 'the act or power of distinguishing; a process for deciding a disputed question'.

The educationist Quintilian saw the point with his usual perspicuity. He was speculating about how an orator could improve his performance, and said copying someone else was not the answer: if you just followed in someone's footsteps, you would always come second. In fact (he went on), it was easier to go that bit further 'because nothing is more difficult to produce than an exact likeness. Nature has failed dramatically in this respect: for there is always some discrimen which enables us to distinguish even the things that appear most similar and most equal to each other'.

And that is what university admissions tutors do with their applicants every day. They do not discriminate against them: they discriminate between them, in order to get the best. Why settle for less? In the process, someone has by definition to lose out. Further, Cameron's 'solution' to the problem telling universities to reveal entry statistics — is almost Corbynesque in its stupidity. It implies that universities should control entry by some means other than judgment. Or would Cameron prefer tutors to act (in Cicero's words) 'like the mob, without deliberation, reason or

A prime minister really ought to be a little bit more discerning about our universities than this. Good word, that. Derives from *discerno*...

- Peter Jones

Death on the NHS

Ten years ago, the National Health Service eased my father's final days. My mother, this year, was not so lucky

ANIL BHOYRUL

ve never understood the phrase 'died peacefully'. Two weeks ago I watched my mother die, in the very same NHS hospital where I watched my father die almost ten years earlier.

There was nothing peaceful about it, at least from my unwanted ringside seat. The end — acute pneumonia providing the final nail in a soon-to-be purchased coffin — was painfully slow. It dragged on and on and on. She struggled for her last breaths and appeared distressed, confused and frightened to the end.

The last time I had been to St Helier hospital in south London was September 2005, as my father slowly slipped away. Naturally the memories came flooding back. And so did confusion. Ten years is a long time, especially in the NHS. A lot has changed, and none of it, from what I saw, has been for the better.

Medically, their endings were similar. Both in their early eighties, both with a history of cardiac problems and gradually weakening bodies that could no longer stomach (literally) or respond to more medication. But, bizarrely, I have uplifting memories of 2005. A consultant calling me aside, explaining why there would only be one outcome. He told me to prepare mentally for the imminent death, described in detail what to expect in the coming days, and pointed me to support services. My father was both comforted and made comfortable to the end. An hour after he died, I remember the nursing staff queuing up to offer their condolences. I had no doubt they really meant it. It was both sad and beautiful. And it was definitely dignified.

In 2016 it was different, especially for someone like me who doesn't live in the UK and has not used any NHS services for ten years. During the four days I spent at my mother's bedside, not one consultant approached or contacted me or any other family member. They told us nothing. Mrs Bhoyrul — or 'Bed 13', as she was known — was just another elderly woman waiting to die.

On day three, a nurse told me that the doctor had been and gone when I was in the canteen, so didn't get a chance to speak to me. But he did leave a message — in the form of a crumpled leaflet that read 'Understanding what happens when someone is dying'.

The leaflet gives useful tips on changes you may notice in a dying person, including 'difficulty swallowing', 'changes in breathing' and 'changes in how the person looks'. One section is absurdly called 'changes in nursing and medical care'.

Later that day I approached a junior doctor for an update. She told me things were not looking good. 'Is your mother religious?' she asked. 'Yes,' I replied. She said she would arrange for a priest to visit her. A few hours later, she explained the priest was busy but would definitely 'say a prayer' for her.

I never saw the doctor again. But I did see plenty of nurses. Having read the leaflet explaining why a woman in a near-coma would have no appetite, I couldn't work out why they came by at breakfast, lunch and din-

> From everything I saw, bureaucracy has got the better of humanity

ner to inquire if she wanted a non-vegetarian or vegetarian meal.

The last conversation I had with my mother was on the afternoon of 11 January. 'Are you in pain?' I asked.

'I am,' she stammered back.

Shortly after 9 a.m. on 12 January, I noticed she had stopped breathing. I called a nurse, who confirmed that she had gone. I asked whether I could be alone with her for five minutes, and she agreed. A minute later, another nurse appeared, asking whether she wanted a vegetarian or non-vegetarian meal. I explained that she was dead. Moments later, one of the cleaning staff appeared. It was the last time I saw my mother's face.



'Do you often feel as if you're just drifting?'

Soon after, I went to the hospital's bereavement office, clutching a small bag containing my mother's shoes, reading glasses and some clothes, to arrange the necessary paperwork.

'She's a Hindu, so we would need to do the funeral as soon as possible,' I told them.

'Sorry sir, no chance of a death certificate today. There's a doctors' strike.'

The only positive I can take from all of this is that at least I have no more parents left to die in the NHS. The strange thing is, the NHS is not exactly short of cash. According to the NHS Confederation, net expenditure went up from £64 billion in 2003/04 to £113 billion in the last financial year. The planned expenditure for this financial year is £117 billion. Nearly 33,000 more doctors and 18,500 nurses were hired between 2004 and 2014.

So why aren't things better? Significantly, nearly one in four of the 1.4 million NHS staff are non-medical. Or rather, bureaucrats. Last year, the former M&S boss Lord Rose said in his report into NHS leadership that there was a 'chronic shortage of good leaders', and that the 'administrative, bureaucratic and regulatory burden is fast becoming insupportable'.

I couldn't agree more. From everything I saw, bureaucracy has got the better of humanity. I wouldn't say that doctors and nurses no longer care for their chosen profession, but the system is certainly making it harder for them to do so. They appear overworked, burnt out and completely lacking senior support. In the US, many consultants will visit their patients at least twice a day. They do this largely for legal reasons, to avoid litigation if a patient dies. Getting a visit from a consultant in the NHS just once is pure luck.

MPs need to distinguish between protecting the NHS and protecting the NHS budget.

I know that there is nothing medically that could have been done to change the outcome. My mother was dying, pure and simple. Nothing and nobody could have saved her. Whether initially admitting an 81-year-old woman with acute pneumonia to a room with three other patients was the soundest move medically (more for the other three patients), I am not in a position to say. Whether it was right to send her home with oral antibiotics after her first visit to the emergency room, a week before she was admitted, I'll never know.

But I also know that after my father died, my mother and I both marvelled at the wonders of the NHS. I would bore her with stories about who Aneurin Bevan was. We agreed that this was an organisation to be championed and praised for its quality of care and quality of staff. Regardless of age, background or condition, the one thing the NHS never did was stop caring.

Wherever she is now, I doubt she still feels that way.

Fear of the baby-snatchers

Why many mothers with post-natal depression now dread a visit from social services

LARA PRENDERGAST

Baby George was born into a happy family. His mother and father love him dearly. He lives in a cottage in a pretty Sussex village, with a six-year-old sister who adores him, and his grandmother lives nearby. His parents both have good jobs and his nursery is filled with toys. By most measures, George has had a good start in life.

It was only when his mother was diagnosed with post-natal depression that George's prospects looked bleaker. Not because his caring mother was feeling blue, but because in this, paranoid, post-Baby P era, the authorities take no chances. The slightest whiff of a mother unable to cope, and they swoop down, ready to whisk the baby away.

When Rosie first realised she was depressed, she assumed the doctor would be able to offer her advice about how to cope. She knew one in ten mothers develops the 'baby blues', so she had every expectation of sympathy.

Instead, her condition was code red to the authorities. Before long, Rosie found her diary filled with visits from all kinds of ominous figures: social services, child protection officers, mental health workers, who offered little practical support but made her feel hounded. Soon, the suggestion was made that George — then six months old — might be taken away from her. Unsurprisingly, this made her feel worse, and so she was put on a cocktail of strong drugs. There was no option of not taking the drugs, according to the authorities. They could test her blood, they said, and if she had missed her medication, George could be removed.

These sorts of covert threats increased to the point where Rosie began to feel that she was, indeed, incapable of caring for George, even though her baby was actually fine. George was well-fed, wearing clean clothes, sleeping well and cared for when he woke up in the night. He was a happy baby, blissfully unaware that the state was eyeing him up.

Unfortunately, Rosie's worries that her baby could be taken from her at any moment were far from paranoid. In December, data was released which showed that there has been a 'huge rise' in the number of newborns taken into care: 2,018 babies in 2013, up from 802 in 2008. The report confirmed that there is now a 'general trend towards taking more

timely action'. The angle the papers focused on was that about half of the babies were from mothers with other children in care. But what about the others? What if there are a thousand mothers like Rosie who just needed encouragement?

It's hard to find out who these poor mothers are because family courts, where these types of decisions are made, are so secretive. There is no jury involved, so the fate of the child — and the family — is usually sealed by a judge or a handful of magistrates who

Secrecy means that we assume babies taken into care are all the offspring of junkies or troubled teenagers

decide the result on a balance of probabilities, rather than the criminal-law standard of 'beyond reasonable doubt'. Reporting restrictions are often in place and it is normally illegal to reveal court proceedings, or even the judgment. Appeals are also notoriously difficult. Families are being broken up behind closed doors, and while the culture of secrecy protects the children involved, it also protects the authorities.

Such secrecy means that we all assume babies taken into care are the offspring of junkies or teenage mothers with abusive boyfriends. But Rosie doesn't fit this picture, and nor do many other mothers who have had to

FROM THE ARCHIVE What to do with Syria?

From 'The future of Syria', The Spectator, 5 February 1916: We say with all the emphasis at our command, and without the slightest fear of contradiction, official or otherwise, not only that we do not want Syria for ourselves, but that nothing would induce us to take it. Englishmen of all parties; or political schools of thought — as we ought now perhaps to call them - are agreed that the British Empire is quite big enough already, and that at the close of the war the danger will be, not of our getting too little, but of our getting too much — of getting, that is, more territory than we shall have the man-power or financial strength to manage and develop properly. forfeit their children, if the internet is to be believed. In online chatrooms where anonymity allows mothers to speak freely, there is plenty of discussion about the fear that social services — or the SS — will remove your child if you ask for any help. Rumours about adoption targets also swirl around, with members of the 'SS' occasionally popping up to deny them. While it's true targets are no longer officially in place, they were being used until 2008, with cash rewards offered to councils for arranging 'forced adoptions'. It's hardly surprising that some mothers still feel concerned about them.

Interestingly, Rosie says that throughout all the meetings, there was never any suggestion that her daughter should be put into care. The authorities only seemed interested in George. Rosie was convinced that this was because chubby, rosy-cheeked babies are easier to find homes for.

But even if targets are no longer being used, the world of adoption and fostering can be lucrative. As a Policy Exchange report in 2012 showed, fostering has become a profitable industry. The average cost of keeping each of the 65,000 children then in care in England was £37,000, an annual bill of £2.4 billion. According to results filed at Companies House, Foster Care Associates, the largest independent foster agency in the UK, made more than £5 million profit in 2014. As for foster parents, on average they can earn around £400 per child per week. Then there are the fees for other employees of the 'childcare' system - the sort of experts Rosie had so many appointments with. Does the money act as an incentive to turn minor and fixable family problems into situations from which a child needs rescuing?

Perhaps one of the most alarming elements of the new fashion for removing babies from their natural families is the lack of care provided to desperate mothers once they've lost their child. According to Professor Karen Broadhurst, who led the research into newborns taken into care, 'The key issue is that England doesn't have any statutory requirements for post-removal support.' Until the child is removed, the system runs at full throttle, as Rosie discovered. But once the baby is gone, very little help is offered. Imagine having your child wrenched away from you, only to discover that the apparatchiks no longer gave a fig about your wellbeing. Keep taking the pills or don't — it no longer matters to them.

There will always be children who are genuinely at risk, and social services have an undeniably hard job. But what families like Rosie's need is support, not separation. Rosie is a good mother. Her post-natal depression has now subsided and, because she fought hard to prove her worth, George is still with her. For other families, there may be more tragic endings.

Names have been changed.

MATTHEW PARRIS

Why I now believe in positive discrimination



he Prime Minister no doubt knew he would be fanning the flames when he waded into the argument about the admission of black undergraduates to universities like Oxford and Cambridge. Doubtless, too, there are considerations of political advantage that David Cameron takes into account when raising issues like this. But we should do him the courtesy of trusting he means it when he says he feels strongly about discrimination in the awarding of university places — and I think he does.

The question, though, is follow-through: what can be done? I have become a firm believer in positive discrimination — in questions not of race alone, but of background and of gender more generally.

As a younger Conservative and as an MP I took the line Tories instinctively take: all selection should be on 'merit', and 'the best candidate' should unfailingly win the prize. Labour's idea of (for instance) all-woman shortlists appalled me and still does; positive discrimination for jobs, university places or parliamentary candidatures in favour of candidates from minority ethnic groups seemed to me to discriminate unfairly against white applicants. Fair was fair and that was that.

I've come to believe it isn't so simple. If of course you believe that black, brown or female applicants might as a class simply be inferior to their white (or male) equivalents, then you'd struggle to reach any conclusion other than that this and nothing else was the reason why they tended to perform worse in selection processes. But what if there are other reasons? Let me suggest three. First, confidence. Secondly, polish. Third, unconscious bias on the selectors' part.

This third, unconscious bias, is troubling. I was dismayed to try an online test for racial bias the other day and find that I was 'mildly' discriminating against black faces. This surprised me. Less surprising (because I've mediated many Conservative selection meetings for parliamentary candidates) is the observation that people doing the choosing have more difficulty in seeing (say) a woman as an MP — and so, though they do mean to be fair and apply the same standards to all, will find themselves less impressed by a woman's performance.

Which brings me to the first of my sug-

gested reasons for bias in selectors: 'confidence'. In candidate selections I've noticed that men have a certain swagger that women often lack. Look at the principal boy in any village-hall pantomime — the woman who plays Prince Charming, for instance — and note how women caricature us men. There's a lot of thigh-slapping, strutting, and yo-ho-ho about it. Swagger does not equate to competence, and we should know this — but we sometimes forget it when we are (and there's no other phrase) taken in by an individual's self-belief.

And this in turn brings me to the third characteristic that can distract us in our quest for pure merit: polish. There really *is* something about a private education, a certain

Swagger does not equate to competence, and we should know this, but we sometimes forget it

patina — call it fluency, articulacy, command or polish — that a good public school can impart. An American lady once remarked that so convincing was an Englishman with a public school background that you needed to marry him and live with him for ten years before you realised he was basically just thick. Such candidates — be they for a lady's hand or for a place at Oxford — will impress in ways that appear to selectors to indicate merit but don't.

Successive studies have suggested that, once admitted, state-school pupils do better at university than their independent-school peers with comparable A-level grades. There may be all kinds of reasons for this: to the confidence and polish that a private education can impart, we may add the 'forcing' of a child's scholastic progress by Oxbridge-



directed teaching, even private tutoring, so that effort translates more efficiently into exam grades. The state-school child's ability may not have been so single-mindedly funnelled into achieving starred As; but once the university course is embarked upon, with its emphasis on understanding rather than regurgitating, the state-school girl or boy comes into their own. They had previously been held back.

And if we accept that something may often be holding back the black or brown university applicant, or the woman in the jobs market, then surely considerations of 'merit' invite us to compensate for that handicap? One can continue to believe in selection by merit, continue to believe in getting the best person for the job or university place, but in assessing merit one will now take intelligent account of potential as well as alreadydemonstrated performance. Once you realise that a car has been being driven with a handbrake on, or a child educated without much encouragement from peer group, family or teachers, you adjust your expectations of how that car would perform unbraked, or how that child could perform unhindered.

And the odd thing is that any parent, any good teacher and any good employer knows this instinctively and through experience. We all know the importance and justice of 'bringing someone on' — of giving them a chance, that is, that past performance may not appear to warrant, in the belief that they may just need a bit of a boost.

This, of course, is a principled argument for positive discrimination: it is not in itself a workable proposal for adopting the practice at the semi-formalised level at which politics, university admission or human resources have to work. Systematising a good idea can poison it. Any points-based system that adds or subtracts points in a tick-box manner on the basis of race, gender or class carries its unfairness on its face and will prove counter-productive. It's therefore greatly to be hoped that those responsible for university admissions policy will study David Cameron's remarks carefully and quietly, realise the justice of what he is saying, and try to find ways of giving effect to his exhortations informally. The proof will be in the results. I am sure it can be done.

HUGO RIFKIND

The London mayoral election will be a battle between whatsisface and whatsisname



ondon, 2012. It's Olympic year, and east London is sprouting anew, and our city feels like the capital of the world. And on this mighty, epoch-making canvas, two political heavyweights do battle. In the blue corner, Boris Johnson, the incumbent, and perhaps the most recognisable politician in the land. In the red, Ken Livingstone, his predecessor and opposite in almost every way, except for the reputation for shagging.

He's a little tarnished by now, Ken, true, a little old, a little Jew-hatey and yesterdayish, but he still stands for something that Boris does not. His is a fiercely multicultural London, a little dirty, perhaps, but vibrant and arty, too; a bubbling pot of culture and faux-socialism (fauxialism?) into which the suburbs slink each morning, warily, to earn all the money. Boris's, by contrast, is a place of leafy suburbs, and inner-city glass and steel. His ethos, if he has one, is that the higher that glass and steel stretch, the more the grassy foothills will be borne skywards, too.

It is a clash of world-views, of rival visions for the urban experience itself, by two men who only need one name each. The rivalry is personal, too; they loathe each other and squabble in lifts. For the previous four years, indeed, Ken has been Boris's personal troll, frequently lurking, and heckling, in City Hall. London loves the drama; everybody has a view. And then the polls open, in this mighty metropolis at the centre of the world. And only about a third of us can really be arsed.

In May, London sees another conflict, this time between whatsisface and whatsisname. What turnout do you foresee for Sadiq vs Zac? What, indeed, will we even be voting about? I mean this as no great slur on either, because both to my mind seem relatively sane. Only I can't figure out for the life of me what difference it makes if we get one or the other.

Sadiq Khan tells us that he will concentrate on housing. Zac Goldsmith will also concentrate on housing. Zac Goldsmith is against a third runway at Heathrow, and so is Sadiq Khan, and in the end neither of them have the

power to build one or stop one anyway. Both are very concerned about pollution and want to plant more trees. Zac wants the Tube to run at night. Sadiq also wants the Tube to run at night. Zac reckons there mustn't be any more strikes. So does Sadiq, albeit from a different direction, which is probably a terribly important distinction if you're a tube driver, which you almost certainly aren't.

More policies will emerge in time, I suppose, but expect nothing sweeping, not least because a London mayor can't do much that is sweeping, even if the electorate would vote for it. At the time of writing, the only major

Paradoxically, devolution has been brilliant for London, bringing in money and Crossrail and bike routes

difference (as in, something they actually disagree on, rather than something that one of them has simply thought of first) seems to be that Sadiq has promised a 'living rent' cap on new-build properties, which might provide a vast amount of more affordable housing or, more likely, would provide a tiny amount of it and a sweeping legalistic nightmare but would make us all feel like better people. Still, it might be enough to give him the edge.

Time and time again I've heard that London's mayoral election will be a referendum on Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of Labour. This to me seems unlikely, because the subsection of the electorate who simultaneously



a) have noticed Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of Labour, and b) don't realise that Sadiq Khan has nothing to do with it, must be infinitesimally small. In fact, London will simply vote on which of these chaps it wants to be mayor. Or rather, in vast part, probably won't.

It doesn't help that with a year left in the job, Boris sloped off back to Parliament, clearly bored out of his mind. And it certainly doesn't help that, for all of their myriad differences, Boris's London has been more of a continuation of Ken's than a departure from it. Paradoxically, devolution has been brilliant for this city, bringing in money and clarity and Crossrail and bike routes, as well as an ever-burgeoning sense of civic identity that had badly ebbed in the hiatus between the GLC and the GLA. Only for all that, within the parameters of the sane, it doesn't seem to make all that much difference who actually does the job. Hence the way that three months from now, hardly anybody is going to give a toss. You'll see.

Wit of Wogan

I met the late, great Sir Terry Wogan a couple of times. Most recently was at the Cheltenham Literature Festival a couple of years ago, where I was interviewing him and Sebastian Faulks about their shared love of P.G. Wodehouse. After the gig, there was a book signing. And at this signing, by some terrible administrative error, or perhaps by virtue of not really listening, I ended up sitting between them. Wogan to the right of me, Faulks to the left. The queue went out the door. The crowds surged up. Many, many books flew from that table. But not mine. Never mine.

I gave up after about 20 minutes and skulked away. Just before I went, though, Sir Terry placed a kindly hand on my shoulder. 'Don't feel bad,' he said. 'The same thing once happened to me.'

'Oh gosh,' I said, brimming with gratitude. 'Did it really?'

'No,' he said.

Hugo Rifkind is a writer for the Times.





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LETTERS

Leave those kids alone

Sir: Melanie Phillips was right to raise serious concerns about the emerging practice of challenging children to define their gender identity ('In defence of gender', 30 January). She quoted justice minister Caroline Dinenage as saying that the government was 'very much on a journey' on this issue. The government should therefore give children space and time to follow their own 'journey' of self-discovery and discovery of the world without pressure from above to choose labels to define their own sexuality. They have enough pressure of this kind from their peers.

The tried and tested way for society to help children along this journey has been to teach them subjects like history, literature and science, as these will inevitably give children the tools to make sense of the world and their own emotional life in their own time, and in their own way.

Michael Chambers

Birmingham

Fluidity on the brain

Sir: Reading Maria Miller's pious nostrums on gender fluidity is enough to drive one to drink. While acknowledging the fact that there are a number of people suffering from gender dysphoria, the approach suggested by the Commons Women and Equalities Select Committee is wrongheaded and will have unintended consequences.

No doubt the member for Basingstoke will feel she is striking an important and overdue blow against a perceived transgression — one that can only be rectified by government intervention, taxpayers' money and a host of targets. Most people will, I think, heave a loud collective sigh of irritation. Given the very real problems facing the United Kingdom, this determination to focus on single issues that affect a small minority emphasises the gulf between the electorate and legislature. Alexander McKibbin Ringwood, Hants

Gender dysphoria exists

Sir: The teenage child of dear friends of ours, a happy, functional family, recently began self-harming, attempted suicide and was hospitalised. She (or rather they, as she now self-defines) is finally on the mend thanks to a diagnosis of gender dysphoria and the support she is receiving. I hope they, their family and others going through something similar and in a vulnerable state did not see last week's *Spectator* cover or Melanie Phillips's dangerous article. *Name and address supplied*

Open to interns

Sir: Fraser Nelson (Diary, 28 January) makes an important point about the lack of contacts for interns. My new little company wanted to offer internships to bright youngsters. Two schools did not reply to our letters offering internships. But a fellow on my cricket team was a teacher at an unpromising school. The first 17-year-old he sent us was great. We encouraged him to apply to Oxford and he got in. Such a DIY approach can work.

Doug Shaw London SW3

Piped poison

Sir: Peter Phillips (Arts, 30 January) is absolutely right to say that piped music (muzak) has 'slipped through every legal control' to fill far too many public places. But he appears to think that the only alternative to piped music is an 'absolute' silence. Happily, this is not the only choice. Good pubs, restaurants and shops free of piped music soon fill with the jovial hubbub of people eating, drinking, shopping and talking. Talk can become impossible

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when loud music fills a space — hence the success of places without piped music, from Wetherspoons pubs to Waitrose.

Piped music is a phenomenon of the past 50 years or so. Before then, humanity got on very well with occasional live music. In the gaps between music, both pulse and blood pressure drop. That people miss quiet and calm is suggested by the growing popularity of meditation. One place people are desperately in need of quiet calm is hospitals, which is why we are pressing for a ban on piped music there.

Nigel Rodgers National Secretary of 'Pipedown' Berwick St James, Wiltshire

Easter solution

Sir: Tim Hudson (Letters, 30 January) rightly points out that for most of the population Easter is simply a spring holiday weekend. So maybe the Christian churches should go on observing Easter according to the traditional formula, and the government should allocate two bank holidays to the mid-April weekend, and we can all get on with it. After all, despite this country having an established church, most of our holidays have no religious significance. In France, on the other hand, for all their separation of church and state, there are public holidays for such days as the Ascension, the Monday after Pentecost, the Assumption of Our Lady and All Saints.

Father David Sillince Southampton, Somerset

Islands of cricket

Sir: "Cricket" is naturally the first word that comes into the mind apropos of a summer term,' recorded my school's magazine in 1887. My own state school plays well over 100 fixtures each summer, but almost entirely against independent school opponents ('Elite sport', 23 January).

There are some islands of health and strength, however. The Royal Grammar Schools' cricket festival is one outstanding example. Three state and three independent schools compete in this annual five-day festival, on a level playing field, and playing cricket of excellent quality.

Another cause for optimism is the demise of the Lower Sixth AS exams. Their disappearance reopens the summer term for the 'wild frenzy of cricket' celebrated by my school magazine's editor in 1887. Let's work to ensure that it helps to produce some more state-educated England cricketers.

Dr Chris Pyle Headmaster, Lancaster Royal Grammar School

ANY OTHER BUSINESS | MARTIN VANDER WEYER

I told you so: the UK electricity gap looms wider than ever



mid all the turmoil in global energy markets, we should not lose sight of the UK power programme that we're praying will keep our lights on a decade hence: it is, as you know, a hobbyhorse of mine. So how's it going down at Hinkley Point in Somerset? My man with big binoculars in the Bridgwater Bay nature reserve tells me he's seeing plenty of lorry movements on the nuclear site, but signals from EDF of France — which has a two-thirds interest in this £18 billion project, alongside Chinese investors — are very worrying.

Having already spent £2 billion, the French state utility has deferred until at least the middle of this month a final commitment that was expected last week. Under pressure from unions and minority shareholders, and battered by falling wholesale electricity prices as well as endless delays and problems on its own nuclear new-build at Flamanville near Cherbourg, EDF is evidently begging for more support from its own government before committing such massive resources to solve a problem for ours.

EDF boss Vincent de Rivaz once promised we would be cooking our Christmas turkeys on new nuclear power by 2017; that was before he realised the utter spinelessness of UK energy policy under all recent governments. Analysts still expect EDF to go ahead, but the plant that should provide up to 7 per cent of future UK electricity needs can't possibly come on stream before 2025. And the travails of Hinkley are reported to have 'spooked' Hitachi of Japan, which is in negotiations for another nuclear station at Wylfa Newydd in Anglesey.

Meanwhile, the Institute of Mechanical Engineers has issued a report that reads like an expanded version of my previous column items on this topic. Given decommissioning of all coal-fired stations and most existing nuclear reactors, it argues, the UK does not have the time or resources to build sufficient new capacity to plug what could be 'a 40-55 per cent electricity supply gap' by 2025. Gas offers the easiest solution, but we'd need to build 'about 30 new combined | £700 million (some sources say £1 billion)

cycle gas turbine plants in less than ten years' having built 'just four in the last ten years'. This failure of planning will leave us reliant on imported electricity from Europe and Scandinavia - meaning higher costs and weaker energy security, while demand rises with a growing population and greater use of electricity for transport and heating. I don't like to say it, but I told you so.

Not all bad

Staring out at another damp, dark-grey Yorkshire day, I'm struggling to recall a gloomier start to a new year. But how's the UK economy really doing, beyond the distractions of falling shares and Brexit doubts? It isn't all bad, that's for sure. Growth slowed to 0.5 per cent in the final quarter of 2015, making 2.2 per cent for the full year according to the ONS; but the CBI says 'the overall domestic outlook still looks fairly secure... Low inflation, strong employment growth and rises in real pay also put households in a good position.' And a key manufacturing indicator, the Markit/CIPS purchasing managers' index, rose against expectations from 52.1 in December to 52.9 in January reflecting strong domestic orders offsetting wobbly exports, and looking healthier than the US, where the equivalent index fell.

Meanwhile, new UK mortgage lending was significantly higher than a year ago, indicating more people finding the confidence and the deposit to climb on to the housing ladder; but total mortgage debt fell slightly, indicating a healthy rate of repayments and no crazy boom. I'm not ignoring the negatives; I'm just pointing out that, for now at least, we're stronger than the news and the weather may make us feel.

Femme fatale

I'm fascinated to see that Amanda Staveley — deal-broking *femme fatale*, 'former girlfriend of Prince Andrew' and granddaughter of a Doncaster bookie — is suing Barclays for

in connection with the bank's £5 billion capital-raising from the Gulf in 2008, in which her firm PCP Capital acted for an Abu Dhabi sheikh. The tranche of the deal that involved Oatari investors is still subject to an SFO investigation, but when it's no longer sub judice, this whole saga will make an even better movie than The Big Short. I'd cast Nicole Kidman as Amanda and Kevin Spacey as Bob Diamond.

Opening doors

Connections are a currency to be spent wisely — but spent in good time. If you think you're in the last decade of your working life, I believe the best thing to be done with accumulated connections, before they wither away, is to use them to help young people you know launch their own careers. So I'm sorry to read in the Sunday Telegraph that name-dropping, family ties and 'taking the managing partner out to lunch' are all now strictly out of bounds as methods of getting unjobbed graduates through the plate-glass doors of top City firms; indeed, any attempt to activate such connections is now 'a very big black mark against the candidate'.

Of course we're all for social mobility and level playing fields, and the circle of youngsters for whom we deploy our networks should be drawn wide. This isn't about 'perpetuating privilege' but about the delicate mesh of personal obligations, of favours owed and favours called, that make the world go round. My generation are burdened with moral debt towards the generation before. How each of our lives actually turned out is a function of our own ability and luck, or lack of them - but almost all of us had a helpful kick-start from family or friends. I know I did, both in banking and in journalism. The only way we can ever repay that is by doing likewise for the next lot, which means occasionally fixing an introduction or an internship. We're only trying to open those plate-glass doors, after all. Modern mores say that's a sin, but I'd feel far more guilty if I didn't keep doing it.



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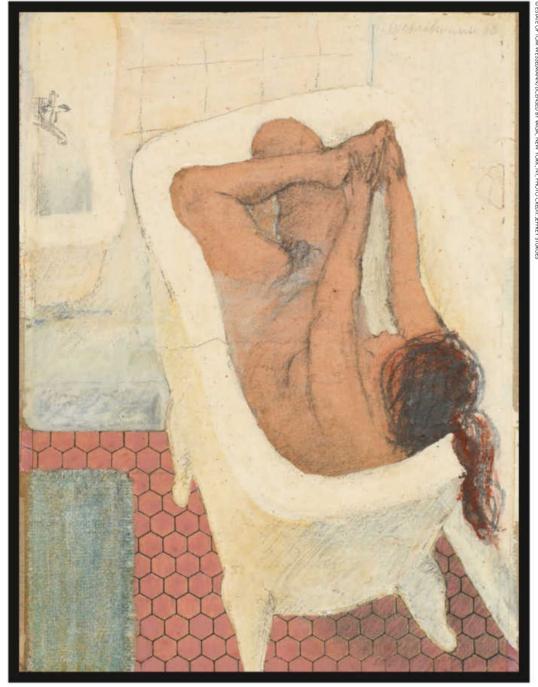
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BOCKS& ARTS

Daniel Hahn finds the writing on the wall at Saqqara full of poetry, puns and riddles Kate Womersley is moved by the memoir of a neurosurgeon who swaps his scrubs for a patient's gown Redmond O'Hanlon welcomes the rediscovery of the forgotten explorer Alexander Humboldt Stephen Bayley is amazed that Halcyon Gallery is allowed to showcase its lower-middlebrow rubbish in Park Lane Ismene Brown is thrilled by Akram Khan's latest immolation Michael Tanner reminds singers of the first rule of operetta: PLAY IT **STRAIGHT**



'Little Bathtub Collage #2', 1960, by Tom Wesselmann Martin Gayford — p54

BOOKS

Tawdry tales of Tinseltown

This collection of Hollywood tittle-tattle is moderately interesting, unpleasantly salacious and largely unsourced, says *Philip Hensher*

West of Eden: An American Place

by Jean Stein Cape, £20, pp. 334, ISBN 9780224102469

This is a very odd book that Jean Stein has compiled — about the evanescent splendour of Los Angeles, which only occasionally touches on the film industry. Its setting's most memorable landmark appears to be the name of one of its districts, written in enormous white letters on a hillside. That, and various opulent houses, preserved in one movie after another and generally concealed from public view. Stein's subject is the failure to leave any kind of a mark — despite huge spectacle and expenditure; and witnesses are reduced to repeating over and over again, 'Well, you should have been there at the time.'

She tells five stories. The first concerns the Doheny family, whose wealth derived from Los Angeles' main commodity before films: oil. The patriarch, Edward L. Doheny, was the principal operator in the Mexican and Californian oil fields until the 1930s. (In the 1920s, Los Angeles wells produced 20 per cent of the world's oil). His son Ned almost certainly shot and killed his secretary and possibly lover, Hugh Plunkett, before killing himself.

Second, there is Jack Warner of Warner Bros — a notoriously vile person. He made an immense fortune in the early days of film, and lived in grand style, with a golf course in his garden which was never used. The colossal house was designed and dressed by the studio art department. This proved a problem when the business magnate David Geffen bought it years later and took his interior designer to see it:

I said: 'This wallpaper was from the imperial palace in China.' She said: 'This is French wallpaper from 1870 or 1880.' I pointed to another piece and said: 'This is a Chippen-

dale.' She said: 'The original is a Chippendale and in the Victoria and Albert Museum. This was made at Warner Brothers.'

Jack Warner was a fool, and went along with the McCarthy investigations into communists in Hollywood to the point of naming names off the top of his head. Despite all the bluster, his testimony reveals a coward:

Ideological termites have burrowed into many American industries, organisations and societies. Wherever they may be, I say let us dig them out and get rid of them.

His second marriage was to a monster called Ann, last glimpsed in a muumuu, demanding that her chauffeur stop so that she could gorge herself at a welfare restaurant on chicken wings, much to his humiliation ('I come from a very distinguished Spanish family in Chile, much better than

She would appear at her own parties hours after dinner had started, kiss everyone and then disappear again

the Warners'). Jack's chief enjoyment was that entertainment for the empty-headed: gambling. He is the subject of the most amusing photo caption of the book: 'Mr Jack Warner, astride a lion, surrounded by yes-men.'

Third, there is Jane Garland, the pathetic schizophrenic daughter of another rich couple, who was cared for in private circumstances rather than in hospital. Her sad story is told in invasive detail by people who had no medical knowledge, and who in some cases took horrible advantage of her vulnerability. This episode is one of the most unpleasantly salacious things I've ever read, and quite unjustified.

Fourth, the actress Jennifer Jones, who is nearly forgotten now, strangely. She won an Oscar for her first starring role

in The Song of Bernadette, and subsequently appeared in Madame Bovary, The Barretts of Wimpole Street, Love is a Many-Splendoured Thing and Duel in the Sun. She was never really a box-office favourite — which perhaps explains her story. After a first marriage to Robert Walker (remembered for his role as the sinister Bruno Anthony in Hitchcock's Strangers on a Train), she made a habit of marrying well. Her second marriage was to the paranoid, amphetamine-addicted film producer David O. Selznick, long after his glory days of King Kong, Gone with the Wind and Rebecca; and her third was to Norton Simon, an immensely wealthy art collector. (His collection was, one might reflect, the only thing that any of these people left behind worth being remembered for.) Jones, who had been born Phylis Lee Isley, was renamed by Selznick and lived with him in extravagant style and with very curious social manners.

One guest recalled:

We'd sit down, and dinner would begin. Finally Jennifer would appear for the first time, at least two and a half hours after dinner had started, in the most gorgeous evening dress you've ever seen. She would walk the length of the room, go to every table, shake hands and kiss everybody, and then disappear. She would come back later in a second dress and then disappear again. She never sat down. We'd have coffee in the living room and she would appear in a third dress. I've never had such a good time.

By the time Jennifer was married to Simon, she was spending the price of 'a house in the valley' on hair and make-up every year, according to the man who was charging her. At the same time, she persuaded Simon to lavish yet more money on his interiors. Towards the end, she grew a little confused — for instance, at the funeral of the Los Angeles psychoanalyst



Jennifer Jones in her first starring role as Bernadette Soubirous

Milton Wexler. According to her son, Bob Walker:

It was a major, major party... it was crazy. All the best doctors, all the best analysts and scientists were there. It was an incredible get-together. Mom wasn't sure if Milton had been her husband. She'd talk about him. 'I miss him; were we ever married?' 'No, Mom, he was your analyst.'

This is possibly the first time the success of a party has been judged by the fact that it was full of scientists, but never mind.

Finally, there is the story of the author's own childhood house (now owned by Rupert Murdoch). The interests of the very rich are explored ('I became close to your father,' says one interviewee, 'because he was fascinated by taxes and

money'). Ghostly reminiscences of previous chapters' heroes also appear here. It is all moderately interesting — and makes one think that there is no oblivion like the one that money confers on its possessors. In the 1920s Edward Doheny approached Cecil B. De Mille with the idea of making his film biography (which 'rather amused' De Mille). Now Doheny is forgotten — though we are told that Paul Thomas Anderson's recent film, *There Will Be Blood*, is based on his life. But this is only one of several sources. It is really a free adaptation of Upton Sinclair's *Oil!*

West of Eden is presented in a curious way, and one which seems to be increasingly popular in American publishing (I reviewed a similar book about J.D. Salinger

a couple of years ago). It imitates the TV documentary style of talking heads. Quotes are successively ascribed to witnesses, and the stories are told by people who were there. This has its drawbacks. Some people are gifted storytellers, such as the excellent science-fiction novelist and Doheny grandson Larry Niven, who tells a good one about his grandmother showing her bum to her gynaecologist at a party. But most people just drearily summarise what other people were like, without the telling detail. Of Ned Doheny someone says:

Apparently he had a great sense of humour and was a lot of fun, but I wouldn't be surprised if there weren't some issues with depression. I have a strong sense that there was loneliness there.

The book gives only the most cursory credits for some of these quotations. Sources like Arthur Miller and the McCarthyite trade unionist Roy Brewer died a decade or more ago. Others simply don't sound like interviews. The art curator Walter Hopps says of Norton Simon: 'By the 1970s, many millions later, he had acquired an extraordinary art collection — and Jennifer Jones was a prize possession indeed.' Yet other quotes are clearly part of transcribed conversations, as when Anne Terrail says of her grandfather Jack Warner:

But who cares if someone is charming if they are not there? I feel he didn't want trouble. That is what I feel. It went down three generations. Now, I am trying.

There is a plain ethical duty here to state whether the quotations are printed, or from interviews or from correspondence. It's boring, I know, but there is no excuse for omitting your sources, even — or perhaps especially — when the stories have so thoroughly sunk into the opulent oblivion that they have here.

'Crazy mixed-up Yid' Andrew Lycett

Jumpin' Jack Flash: David Litvinoff and the Rock'n'Roll Underground

by Keiron Pim Cape, £16.99, pp. 386, ISBN 9780224098120

Even David Litvinoff's surname was a concoction. It was really Levy. Wanting something 'more romantic', he appropriated that of his mother's first husband. So his elder half-brother, the respected writer Emanuel Litvinoff, informed Keiron Pim, adding that David was 'an unfortunate character altogether', prone to 'inventing roles for himself that didn't have any reality'.

Yet this fantasist is the elusive figure whom Pim has endeavoured to capture in an ambitious book which seeks to resurrect an era as much as an individual. David Litvinoff was an extraordinary live wire who, by dint of a quick wit and chameleon personality, propelled himself from an immigrant background in London's East End to cavorting with wealthy ex-public-school boys in Chelsea and gangsters in Soho. His heyday in the 1950s and 1960s coincided with the emergence of 'Swinging London', as class barriers

broke down and new energies swirled, often fuelled by drugs and rock'n'roll.

Litvinoff initially blagged himself a place in a house owned by the artist Timothy Whidborne in Cheyne Walk, where George Melly also lived. He worked in a Soho clipjoint and found wealthy punters for John Aspinall's semi-legal gaming clubs. He assisted another housemate, Old Etonian Andy Garnett, to start a multicultural club in Cable Street, not far from his birthplace. As a gossip columnist on the *Daily Express*, he publicised such happenings, and so helped fan the myth of the racy Chelsea set.

Before long he was best mates with Lucian Freud, the husband of Whidborne's cousin, Lady Caroline Blackwood. The two men fell out over a portrait of Litvinoff which Freud had disparagingly titled 'The Procurer'. One result, it seems (though it is not clear), was that Freud had his friend's head brutally shaved (the artist's reputation is not enhanced here). Litvinoff suffered rather worse — his face was slashed — when he overdid his joshing relationship with Ronnie Kray, whom he used to call 'bootface'.

Operating at the edgy rather than hippy-dippy end of the Sixties revolution, his experiences and contacts led him to be hired as 'dialogue consultant' on the sinister 1970 film *Performance*, which captured the shift-

ing boundaries of the time, including those of sexual identity.

As with most aspects of Litvinoff's life, there are varying accounts of his actual involvement. Pim works hard to interpret them and delivers an excellent summary of the film. However, this was the zenith of his subject's career. Finding little to detain him in London, Litvinoff decamped to Wales, and then to Australia. Depressed, he returned to Kent, where he stayed with the art dealer Christopher Gibbs at Davington Priory, now owned by Bob Geldof. It was there he took his own life in 1975, in a small bedroom which Pim likens to the garret pictured by Henry Wallis's 'The Death of Chatterton'

Pim is clearly obsessed with this character, who died three years before he was born. As a co-religionist (through his mother), he empathises with him as a wandering, roleswapping Jew. In Litvinoff's case (though not Pim's), this sense of otherness was enhanced by being gay. He is described as 'brave' — which is true of his uncomplicated acceptance of his sexuality at a time when, for the most part, it was illegal.

Pim proves an intelligent, if occasionally over-diligent, guide to this protean world, mixing a *Quest for Corvo* model with Iain Sinclair's psycho-geography. His descriptive powers are particularly good at the start, where, drawing on his own background, he explores Litvinoff's Jewish and East End roots. Along with Emanuel Litvinoff (now dead), he interviews gangsters such as 'Mad' Frankie Fraser who, being in their dotage, cannot tell him much. Cue for an enduring theme about memory's frailty, be it through age, drugs or simply misremembering.

Friends of David Litvinoff, including the present Lord Harlech, Christopher Gibbs and Eric Clapton, speak fondly of him. Others are not so sure. The socialite Suna Portman noted: 'He seemed to know all of us rather better than we knew him,' while Mick Jagger and Bob Dylan ignored Pim's approaches.

Dylan is an appropriately spectral presence. With his hustler's skills, Litvinoff was thrilled to secure an advance copy of the Jewish troubadour's *Basement Tapes*, and even more so the proofs of his then unpublished novel *Tarantula*. He suggested to a friend that they produce 100,000 bootleg copies and sell them at 40 shillings each. Until then the most he had earned was \$4,000 for *Performance*.

Pim delights in Litvinoff's ability to flit between identities — one moment queeny aesthete, the next street-hustling procurer. He plays with the cultural ramifications of this self-styled 'crazy, mixed-up Yid' being so difficult to pin down. Even his title is a tease: Litvinoff had nothing to do with the Rolling Stones song. But, like Jumpin' Jack Flash, he was by turns fast, flickering and a trifle demonic — a performance artist indeed.

Losing a Crown in the National Portrait Gallery

The cafe was full of connoisseurs of the scones. As he bit into his flapjack a sinister uncoupling took place and he felt the crown of a tooth jerk free — to be rescued behind a discreet paper napkin. Now the geography of his mouth was unfamiliar, harsh and sharp.

No wonder those Tudors in their portraits kept their mouths shut. No white-clad guru for them, injecting, probing, drilling and finally murmuring: One more rinse for me please. No, they had to make do with white paint, and opium, and hiding unfortunate swellings under a generous ruff.

But no more speculation, for it is
Friday afternoon, and he must hurry home
to find a weekend dentist, who will
lay him down and restore him — whatever the cost —
from a tight-lipped misanthrope
to a man who can smile and show his teeth
with the best of them.

— Connie Bensley



'The Evening' by Caspar David Friedrich

Roaming in the gloaming Paul Keegan

The Last of the Light: About Twilight

by Peter Davidson Reaktion, £20, pp. 208, ISBN 9781780235103

One of the epigraphs to Peter Davidson's nocturne on Europe's arts of twilight is from Hegel: 'The owl of Minerva begins to fly only at dusk', an image of philosophy as posthumous, able to explain things only after we have experienced them. Or an image of dusk as threshold, the blue hour when light transforms itself, and other worlds become possible.

The Last of the Light is a cultural companion to such notions. A cabinet of curiosities — paintings, poems, music — framed by the idea of Europe as an archipelago of regret, many of whose most vital artefacts have dealt in echo and obscure longing, translated into a feeling for light. This is a trail going back to Virgil, poet of shadows, or else starting from Christian ideas of a crepuscular fallen world. The motif of ubi sunt is that we were always too late, that European culture is an enfilade of rooms, each opening forwards while looking backwards, in what Davidson calls 'serial nostalgias'.

It is a theme rather than a subject, and he traces its variations in a patent blend of memoir, evocation of place and cultural itinerary. Davidson's recent excursions into this terrain (his earlier book *The Idea of North* was a mixed-media exploration of nordicity) have been increasingly personal in register. This too is a book of the north, necessarily — long twilights only occur between the 50th and 70th parallel — rather than of places and latitudes where the sun drops like a stone.

It is also a declaration of allegiance to lost causes and shadowy histories: the landscapes of Catholic recusancy (Lancashire, the Herefordshire marches, northeastern Scotland) or the Jacobite north; Anglican ritual, the arts of the Stuart court, English Baroque in all its forms. There is a wistful affinity with minor masters, silver ages and fins de siècles, as opposed to 'shining' moments of cultural belonging or imperial confidence. We are drawn into dark and forgotten corners: draughty churches at 'smokefall' (T.S. Eliot), the 1930s world of the Shell Guides and their tutelary spirits Rex Whistler and John Piper. Or shabby postwar England, before the builders moved in, when this island was still a congeries of provinces linked by A-roads, as depopulated as a Ravilious watercolour. Whatever has suffered 'modernist obloquy' belongs potentially in the underworld of twilight.

The Last of the Light attends to the mood, rather than the spirit, of the age — whatever the age. The focus shifts back and forth, freewheeling between texts and

images. Perhaps too freely, as if there were no differences of kind to be negotiated, no friction. It is in many respects an anthology of quotations, held together by virtuosic descriptive passages. But rather than clinching what he has to say, or relieving us of our certainties (as quotations should), the poetic instances he chooses are often inertly illustrative, windows onto his meanings. The prose quotations likewise raise difficulties, since he isn't able to give them enough space to establish atmosphere.

Oddest of all is the books's intermittent impulse to memoir — as evocative drapery, concealing as much as it reveals, rather than providing a narrative. Twilight is the world of what is unsaid or half-said, of shared obliquities between unnamed friends who appear at the edges of vision. We find ourselves in Andalucia at one point, but only learn why in an endnote: Davidson's grandfather was Honorary Consul for the Anglo-Spanish community of sherry merchants at Cádiz in the 1920s. If only we had been told more. There is altogether too much trailing of suggestion by a farouche autobiographical presence. W.G. Sebald is one of the book's presiding spirits, and the Sebaldian 'I' is an unfortunate influence, the prose at once fastidious and vague.

Equally the loose workings of association. Disparate figures from different periods are conflated, on the same pages, without transition. Their affinities are not argued into place but 'come to mind'. Works prefigure or recall or echo each other;

Tiepolo resonates with the Danish lowlight master Hammershoi, John Sell Cotman is not unlike Caspar David Friedrich. In this museum without walls the connections are finally too tenuous and personal.

Twilight is an uninvestigated essence, and we learn little about the political and ideological dusk that might lie beyond poem or picture. What we are offered instead are the changes rung upon that static and unaccountable thing, sadness. Thus 'the fathomless sorrow of Victorian England' is invoked as a given, but there are no explanatory connections as to what made it so — no reference, for example, to Victorian science and its stupefying news from nowhere. All is attributed to the waning of affect.

What this book displays finally is a pathology rather than a sensibility — plangent, marinated in melancholy and compelled to repeat itself. The Last of the Twilight is itself a work of belatedness, an exhibit in its own cabinet. It seems at first like a heroic solo attempt to re-enchant the world from a surprising angle. But the effect is something else: a sense that what we have lost is lostness itself. The hiding places have been run to ground, in the amnesiac glare of an implied present, beyond the hearing of history. As if there are no thresholds left to cross, no looking glass through which to be translated, no more twilight.

Odi et amo Philip Womack

Catullus' Bedspread: The Life of Rome's Most Erotic Poet

by Daisy Dunn Collins, £16.99, pp. 312, ISBN 9780007554331

The Poems of Catullus

translated by Daisy Dunn Collins, £8.99, pp.156, ISBN 9780007582969

Reading Daisy Dunn's ambitious first book, a biography of the salty (in more ways than one) Roman poet Catullus, it struck me how lucky we are: only one copy of his collection of poems survived the ages, hidden under a bushel in Verona.

Catullus might have gone the way of his contemporaries, such as Cinna, whose lynching is immortalised in *Julius Caesar*, and whose poems are now dust. Happily, we have Catullus's small, polished oeuvre, varied and ravishing: there are squibs, lambasting his fellow Romans ('The father has the filthier right hand/ But the son's anus is the more voracious'); fascinating mini-epics traversing all of Greek myth; beautiful marriage hymns; and the 'Lesbia' poems, recounting his affair with



GETTY IMAGES

the aristocratic Clodia Metelli. His verse has an earthy resonance that is yet learned and urbane: though we see him from afar, he looks a lot like we do.

He was active in Rome in the first century BC, 'some of the most uncertain and turbulent times' that city had ever seen. Dunn ably sketches in the background, as Julius Caesar, Cicero and Pompey warily circle each other. Diurnal matters are clearly rendered, with an eye for evocative - and provocative - detail: Pompey is 'by all accounts an enthusiastic lover; women had been known to leave his bed wearing the imprint of his teeth', while Caesar 'tended to remove excess body hair with tweezers'. There is insight into Roman contraceptives: 'Post-coitus, she should squat down and sneeze a good few times, wipe herself down, and have a cold drink.' As Dunn drily notes, this seems to have worked for Catullus, as he never had any children. All of this is enjoyable and diligently researched.

Difficulty arises, however, whenever our subject appears. Dunn must infer from the poems what biographical details she can, and this has its problems, as we can't say — even with a poet who drew so closely on his own life — what is persona and what is not.

These are the basic facts: Gaius Valerius Catullus was born about 84 BC, in provincial Verona, part-Gaul, part-Etruscan, to a wealthy family and, like many seeking their fortunes, moved to Rome. Here, he fell in love with the older, married Clodia Metelli, a scion of the ancient Claudii family. (Her brother, Clodius Pulcher, had de-toffed his name so he could represent the plebeians — rather as James Blount has lost the telling 'o' — and his sister fol-

lowed suit.) But after an intense affair, Clodia switched to another raffish young patrician, and Catullus went off to Bithynia, where 'baby crocodiles rolled in the spring at Chalcedon'; he died from unknown causes in his 30th year.

It is the poems that Catullus wrote about Clodia that are his best known. He cast her as 'Lesbia' - metrically equivalent to Clodia - and charted his feelings about her, from peak of love to trough of despair. Yet this relationship, and Catullus himself, remain curiously undeveloped in Dunn's book. When we first meet Clodia, we are told that a 'combination of intensity and introspection lent her a gravitas Catullus had never seen in a woman before'. Such conjectures, alas, don't really help us to understand who she was, and why Catullus loved

her so much. The glimpses we get of this woman, in Catullus and Cicero, are tantalising: a poet herself, she outlived all who loved her, and saw the rise of an empire. We are lucky — but not lucky enough: if only her story had survived, too.

As for Catullus:

On bad days he was given to believe that times were getting worse. On better days he accepted that humans are simply predisposed to finding their own times inferior to those that came before them.

This doesn't do justice to this poet of extremes and paradox.

Dunn's undoubted strength is as a sure-footed and elegant literary critic, particularly when it comes to poem 64,

Catullus assumes the role of the wounded Ariadne, casting Clodia as the cruel Theseus

the scintillating mini-epic from which she takes the title of her book. The 'bed-spread', a physical object within the poem, is embroidered with the story of the abandoned Ariadne: as she points out, Catullus often took the 'wounded', feminine role, with Lesbia as the cruel Theseus. (Dunn's own deft version is included as an appendix; and she has translated, with bright-eyed intelligence, all the poems in another volume.) It is insights like this that make our poet come alive.

Catullus' Bedspread is richly woven, and Dunn's deep passion for her subject is patent, as she sifts through the smallest of hints to build up her picture; yet while the backdrop is striking, the figure of Catullus himself remains as elusive as ever.

Down and out in Park Lane and Plaistow

Henry Hitchings

This is London: Life and Death in the World City

by Ben Judah Picador, £18.99, pp. 424, ISBN 9781447272441

'I was born in London,' Ben Judah tells us early in this vivid portrait of Britain's capital, 'but I no longer recognise the city.' London has become a building site where dirty money is converted into gleaming blocks of bullion. The smartest parts of town are lined with empty houses owned by foreign plutocrats, and London's spirit is embodied not so much by the bearded hipster brewing your £3 cup of coffee as by the Shard, a soaring monument to wealth and inequality.

Judah isn't all that interested in the well-shod hirelings who lubricate this shiny capitalism. We're halfway into the book before we encounter anyone who could be described as privileged (other than the widely-travelled, Oxford-educated Judah). Then it's Nahla, a bored Egyptian who introduces him to a world of expensive nightclubs where rich young men from the Middle East sit surrounded by glinting champagne bottles. Later, he traipses along the King's Road and observes the red-trousered swells lolloping towards Fulham — 'a ghetto of signet rings'.

But mostly he focuses on the 'immigrant city' - the third of London's population that was born abroad — and especially its paupers, earnest strivers and petty crims. The book's cast consists of prostitutes and their patrons, pleading beggars and crack addicts rummaging in bins, jaundiced social workers and police officers dishing up heavily caffeinated insights. There are walk-on parts for loafers and gamblers, chatty cleaners and solemn imams. We see maids from the Philippines, ironing their master's 40 new polo shirts, and Vietnamese gangs furtively wrapping little parcels of skunk. Judah mixes with builders from Poland and Lithuania who laugh at the English propensity for wasting their wage packets in the pub (rather than loading up with cans at the corner shop and necking them in the park), and he notices the Muslim girls who go to school carrying two bags, removing their hijabs and putting on make-up the moment they arrive.

Unsure whether to be alarmed or excited by London's new flavours, Judah noses around its grubby highways and unfamiliar suburbs — Neasden, Catford, Plaistow. He listens and assiduously takes notes, waiting for golden epigrams to drop from the lips of the chancers and mendicants he encounters. It's an avocation that demands

patience. 'Eighteen times I walked up and down the Old Kent Road,' he reports, and that ancient, tired route is just the sort of place he finds fascinating. Once the joke of the Monopoly board — the game's one location south of the Thames — it's now puffed by estate agents and property journos; but Judah witnesses more misery than majesty. An almost pub-less and Cockney-free zone, it's an artery channelling cheap labour into the City, and at four o'clock in the morning the pavements teem with cleaners coughing and shivering as they head towards the Square Mile to spruce up acres of carpet.

Judah mentions that he doesn't look Anglo-Saxon and can therefore move among these people without attracting (much) suspicion. He spends time with the Romanians living in the tunnels beneath Marble Arch — 'an invisible village' — and passes himself off as a Russian in order to explore the doss-houses that glut some of

A white woman in Chelsea can expect to live to 90; a Moroccan living by the Westway may barely make it to 63

East London's shabbier parishes. A different kind of flexibility enables him to fall in with Moses, a Shepherd's Bush drug-dealer who surveys his patch like a foreman inspecting a building site, and with Big Yaw, who breaks from picking up litter on the underground to show off a grainy film-clip of the dream home he's constructing in Ghana.

There's more than a touch of George Orwell in Judah's grimy tour. He shares Orwell's appetite for fieldwork and documenting parts of society that are easily overlooked — for going native in his own country, to borrow an image from V. S. Pritchett. But while Judah also shares Orwell's bruised resilience and scepticism about British institutions, his prose is more impressionistic — and not as seductive.

A less obvious yet equally significant precursor is Henry Mayhew, the Victorian journalist and social reformer whose London Labour and the London Poor was the fruit of long urban rambles and bulged with startling details such as the number of cigar ends Londoners discarded each week (30,000). Like Mayhew, Judah enjoys brandishing statistics. 'There are more illegals in London than Indians,' he tells us, and: 'A gun is fired in London on average every six hours.' There are at least 7,000 prostitutes in London, and 96 per cent are immigrants. A white woman in a Chelsea town house can expect to live to nearly 90, whereas a Moroccan on an estate overlooking the Westway will be doing well if he makes it to 63.

The numbers are irresistibly quotable. But the real strength of This is London is the intimacy of its portraits — of Moses patrolling the White City favelas, the denizens of Harlesden's betting shops ('frazzled Jamaican bums and owlish Nigerian security guards, whimsical Polish carpenters and pouty Irish soaks'), and the so-called Plato of Edmonton, a mental-health worker who warns of the perils of multiculturalism while Judah perches on his faux-leather sofa. Though there are swathes of contemporary London that Judah barely acknowledges, and at times the mephitic air of a bad dream hangs too heavily over his testimony, this vision of 'the world city' is compassionate, fresh and courageous.

Unreliable Narrator

If a clock can be a household's totem then we remain hopeful ours will show us an accurate blue moon before too long.

In the meantime, we're quite used to people asking (ineptly) What's with its arrythmia and beaten-tortoise air?

The much-polished answer is: uncertain timekeeping is remarkably soothing for the under-twenties, disposed to fantastical lie-ins, while visitors can't help but declare themselves,

either, leaping up horribly at its misdirection or, mildly trusting to its idiosyncratic version of the now.

In or above the fray, our clock clucks on plying a number of desirable timezones with its deft black hands as oars.

— Catherine Ormell

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Riddles in the sand

Daniel Hahn

The Silver Eye: Unlocking the Pyramid Texts

by Susan Brind Morrow Head of Zeus, £20, pp.. 290, ISBN 9781784972387

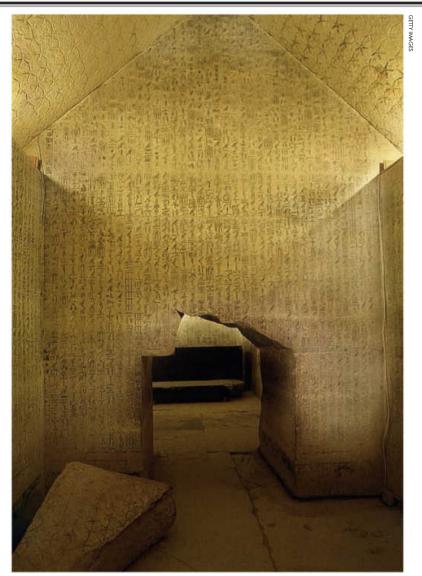
When the Saqqara pyramids were opened in 1880, the chamber walls were found to be covered in hieroglyphic writings, and these texts have been a subject of discussion among Egyptologists ever since. What do they mean? What do they represent? What do they tell us about the religion or the cosmology or the worldview of a culture that can sometimes seem incomprehensibly far from our own?

Taking issue with the scholars that have come before her, Susan Brind Morrow uses this fascinating, challenging book to demonstrate her view that the message on the walls is poetic, timelessly meaningful and sophisticated. Part of her thesis involves simply stripping away the long-held assumption that there must be a mythology behind what is written, suggesting rather that what we're seeing instead is poetic metaphor (that 'silver eye' of the title is the moon, of course). And sometimes, when you've cast aside your mythological obsessions, a literal reading might make more sense. Sometimes an owl is just an owl. This is a complex, dense, clever book, but it's arguing a case for simplicity and clarity.

That's not to say that the writing Brind Morrow analyses for us is itself unsophisticated; merely that a century of Egyptology has seen its interpretation overlaid with things that aren't actually there, things that need to be peeled back to look afresh at what she argues is carefully structured poetry. The texts use all kinds of recognisable writerly techniques — there's a mastery to them, an expertise — with puns and seemingly intentional ambiguities and double meanings (the image of a lion is also the word for a 'gate', giving each gate reference a little added dangerous thrill). They play on sound and sense, and on the double-duty whereby hieroglyphs represent simultaneously concrete and metaphorical things and sounds (that picture of an owl is an owl and all that an owl represents, but it's also an 'm').

There's no mythic narrative to connect it to, but there's pleasingly complex metaphor. There's onomatopoeia (wepwawet is the cry of the coyote, shu the word for air and wind), and there are riddles that depend on sounds or on the interrelation of the carefully arranged physical placing of the figures on the wall — riddles that might resolve into, for example, a star map.

Earlier misreadings are blamed on a fun-



Pyramid texts at Saqqara

damental misunderstanding of the nature of Egyptian religious thought. Where Brind Morrow's own reading is poetic and coherent, her predecessors' have frequently been neither, as scholars have wrestled to make the hieroglyphs fit into their own distorted cultural expectations. She makes her clarity seem incontrovertible. 'How', she asks — after positing her quite uncomplicated explanation of a line — 'can this simple image, with a kind of stately loveliness expressed by the simplicity of the hieroglyphs themselves, be misconstrued to mean the anus of a screeching baboon?' It's a reasonable question.

Alongside her exegesis of the texts, Brind Morrow also includes a full translation of her own. Where the commentary is a piece of detailed practical criticism, this is the work of a poet translating poetry. But translation, too, is interpretative and critical; translation, too, is a reading of, and a comment on, the thing that it is rendering to its new readers.

Personally, being inclined to matters linguistic, I enjoy parenthetical explanations of the uses of vowels, or of the workings of verbs (though you may find your pleasures elsewhere). The code-breaking aspect is satisfying, too. But it's not a book for the faint-hearted. Brind Morrow's intelligence is bracing, and entirely uncompromising. While lay readers may be flattered by the assumption that it's surely as evident to us as it is to her, is a reviewer allowed to make an admission that — with the greatest of efforts — just occasionally he wasn't able to understand the book under review, I wonder?

But even when it's at its hardest, demanding re-reading and re-reading, *The Silver Eye* is a book filled with poetic pleasures and intellectual stimulation. The rewards of revelation come slowly, and they need to be earned. As Brind Morrow writes, describing the experience of reading the hieroglyphs: 'Repetition draws the mind into an evolution of meaning, as though turning the object in the light.'



The Duke of Cumberland takes centre stage at Culloden

Muskets v. the Highland charge

Allan Mallinson

Culloden: Scotland's Last Battle and the Forging of the British Empire

by Trevor Royle Little Brown, £25, pp. 409, ISBN 9781408704011

What a wretched lot the Stuarts were, the later ones especially, the males at least. James II fled England without a fight in 1688, and the battlefield of the Boyne in 1690 earning him the unaffectionate nickname Séamus an Chaca, 'James the Shit'. During the Jacobite rising of 1715 on the death of Anne and the accession of George I, his son Prince James Edward, coming late to the fight from France, fled Scone palace, telling his hapless supporters to 'shift for themselves' after the defeat at Sheriffmuir. In turn his son, Charles Edward, the Bonnie Prince, brought up in Rome, hurried from the field at Culloden in 1746, the culminating battle of the second major rising, the 'Forty-five', having mismanaged the whole affair. 'There goes that Italian coward,' spat Lord Elcho, one of his ADCs.

Only in the Scottish Highlands at that time, 'one of the last feudal societies in 18th-century Europe', could such a bloodline be thought worthy of the throne, let alone dying for. To admit otherwise would have been to undermine the very notion

of feudalism, where blood was legitimacy. Paradoxically, Highland society had been under no danger from the House of Hanover, only where it threatened rebellion. Even its religion, chiefly, but by no means only, Catholicism — there were nonjuring Episcopalians (and south of the border the higher end of the Church of England) long after the death of King William, to whom they had found the oath of allegiance so repugnant — was largely tolerated. There was of course much resentment over the Act of Union, though Prince Charles Edward showed no marked enthusiasm for a return to the status quo ante; his sights were always set on London. He was

The boggy battleground was no place for a charge on foot by exhausted men who hadn't eaten for days

never at home in the heather, contrary to the myths, the ballads and the pictures on shortbread biscuit tins.

His nemesis was a man the same age as he, 25, Prince William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland - clever, educated, soldierly and brave (if somewhat harsh even by the standards of the time). Not only had he seen action in the French wars, notably at Dettingen and Fontenoy, he had considerable experience of command, which meant he could take advice. His father, George II, called him back from Flanders and sent him north to deal once and for all with the 'Highland army', which had got as far south as

Derby before deciding it was a forlorn venture and making back for Scotland. Cumberland coolly disengaged from the running fight, instead securing the eastcoast ports through which the French had been able to supply the insurgents, and made Aberdeen his base for the winter, retraining his troops to deal with the feared 'Highland charge' - a reckless but nevertheless unnerving tactic that had discomfited some of the redcoat regiments. To what extent the device of lunging with the bayonet not at the man immediately to the front, who could parry with his buckler, but to the one adjacent — in essence the old trick of the Roman testudo — was actually employed is questionable, for in a melee instinct prevails; but the army that left Aberdeen for Inverness, the Jacobite base, in April (including several Scots Lowland regiments as well as loyal Highland scouts) did so confidently.

It was, however, the redcoats' disciplined musketry that determined the battle on the 16th, not least their ability to keep their powder and flint dry in the 'dreich' weather of the Moray firth. That and Charles Edward's lamentable choice of ground. Drummossie Moor, six miles east of Inverness, much of it bog, was no place to put one's faith in a charge on foot by men who were tired out by a futile march the night before, had had nothing to eat worth the name for days, and whose only experienced military leaders were in open dispute with the prince over strategy. Even on a fine day (the battlefield is beautifully preserved and marked), it can beggar belief that even a novice could think to give battle there. And novice Charles Edward certainly was.

Trevor Royle is an accomplished military historian of the 17th and 18th centuries, and of the martial Scots generally, and describes the Forty-five with shrewdness and balance, though without the benefit of maps. His prose is lyrical but hardheaded, and the people-centred narrative is always engaging. He sets the Forty-five in its broader historical context, arguing that by affirming the Hanoverian succession, Culloden, and the people who fought there, shaped the whole political landscape of Europe and paved the way for the creation of the British empire. Even the SNP-leaning historian Tom Devine concedes that it underwrote the Scottish Enlightenment.

Whether or not a Jacobite victory at Culloden would have meant ultimate Hanoverian defeat is another matter; Unionism had hidden strengths, then as now. Though the fact that the Lowland regiments that fought on the government side in 1746 are now forced to wear the kilt is food for thought.

From surgeon's scrubs to patient's gown Kate Womersley

When Breath Becomes Air

*by Paul Kalanithi*Bodley Head, £12.99 pp. 232,
ISBN 9781847923677

Who would you trust to take a blade to your brain? Medical schools and hospitals, arbiters of this outrageous intimacy, select the steadiest hands and the steadiest temperaments. Neurosurgery has an almost religious aura, an intellectual status approaching quantum physics and a work ethic of unforgiving precision. Most elusive of all, this elite should be able to express the pleasures and pains of being human. Ian McEwan's fictional neurosurgeon, Henry Perowne, is suspicious in his indifference to literature, whereas Henry Marsh, neurosurgical consultant and author of Do No Harm, has earned respect through his elegant prose. To take care with words is invaluable in the heroic efforts of preserving personhood.

Paul Kalanithi was to become one of these rare surgeon-storytellers. After studying English at Stanford, then history and philosophy of science at Cambridge, medicine was a calling he heard late. Intrigued by man's finitude, he believed that psychiatry would trump the humanities in getting to the essence of what really

matters. But as a medical student at Yale, neurosurgery won his loyalty as a more direct 'manipulation of the substance of our selves'. He returned to Stanford for the eight-year 'black hole' of surgical residency. 'You can't see it as a job,' he said of his beloved profession, 'because if it's a job, it's one of the worst jobs there is.'

Long days and interrupted nights forced Kalanithi to shelve his plans as a writer, applying his aesthetic sensibilities instead to the art of closing stitches. Finally, at the age of 36, 'the Promised Land' of a professorship was in sight. But just before graduation, in the timely fashion of Greek tragedy, he was diagnosed with stage IV lung cancer. Never a smoker and with no known risk factors for malignancy, one of the few things he was unqualified to be was a patient. Confused rather than comforted

Just before graduation, in the timely fashion of Greek tragedy, he was diagnosed with stage IV lung cancer

by his own blamelessness, Kalanithi resisted the costume change from his surgeon's scrubs to a patient's gown, from 'actor to acted upon, from subject to direct object'.

The progression of Kalanithi's illness goads us to exclaim with childlike simplicity, 'It's just not fair.' The book's two most painful scenes show that cancer affronts our deepest instincts for the pace and order of how life's rites of passage should take place. At the birth of his daughter, Cady, Kalanithi watches supine on a hospital cot, his skeletal frame by his wife's side. In that same hospital, eight months later, he removes his life-sustaining oxygen mask, Cady in his arms, while his own parents watched over their dying son. The book's closing pages skilfully reenact the lulls and accelerations of hospital time, distorted rhythms which Kalanithi knew well.

Throughout, his oncologist, Emma, is as much a confidante as an expert. Refusing to assume control, she waits to be entrust-

Easy Street

Roller skating down the main road in the cycle lane, her easy, smooth and flowing scissor stride on booted castors, measured,

steady and elongated, seamlessly pushing through yards and moments, as if traffic was merely imagination and grace impervious to danger.

— Roy Kelly

ed with it. She has one rule: there will be no discussion of the Kaplan-Meier curves that predict survival. These plotlines of medicine claim to foretell how a diagnosis is likely to play out. Ignoring where the graph points, she encourages Kalanithi to be the author of his remaining days, driven by his personal priorities rather than statistics. Kalanithi's life resumes. For a while, medications hold the tumours in check. He finishes residency. He finds solace in the literature he loved in his youth. Though he does not survive to deliver a completed manuscript, thanks to Emma, he has written enough.

It's all too familiar advice that only an examined life is worth living, but how to live so that death becomes meaningful is unclear. Medicine offers one solution, embodied by the student sitting countless exams in pursuit of the truth. The psychological and tacit knowledge afforded to the patient who lies beneath the examining hands of a physician might be another. Or maybe examination is best done in solitude. Our shared search for answers is reflected in the public's appetite for books on doctoring (Atul Gawande), books by patients (Christopher Hitchens) and books about mortality (Julian Barnes). When Breath Becomes Air speaks with the combined authority of these three genres, but its message stays humble. Death is a process eased by the guidance of others, but it remains a challenge for which we cannot be rehearsed.

We are not all in this together

Fisun Güner

The Ministry of Nostalgia

by Owen Hatherley Verso, £14.99, pp. 218, ISBN 9781784780753

Not so long ago I stumbled into a little pop-up in Hoxton: a delightful tearoom hardly bigger than a walk-in wardrobe, all 1940s home-craft 'boutique' style. Nice table linen, a 'make-do-and-mend' tea service with artfully mix-matched china, victoria sponge slices, and the strains of some popular bygone tune in the background. I'm not sure I got much change out of a crisp new tenner, but retro heaven, right?

Before I'd even got my hands on Owen Hatherley's *The Ministry of Nostalgia* (nice austerity-era block-red dust jacket) I had the feeling — call it gut instinct — that this sort of austerity chic might not be quite the author's thing. I don't mean aesthetically — though a little of that too, since Hatherley's thing, as anyone who's read his books on architecture will tell you, is Soviet-

bloc brutalism and the utility end of highmodernism — but ideologically. This short book is all about castigating our current obsession with designer austerity while being fed an endless diet of the gruel of real austerity, along with a gutful of phoney 'We're all in this together'.

So, that's where Hatherley's coming from. He begins with that wretched 'Keep Calm and Carry On' poster, exploring at length its sudden ubiquity from 2009 on.

The blurb promises a 'polemical rampage', but *The Ministry of Nostalgia* is not quite that: it's more thoughtful than blistering, more insightful than ranty, more reflective and intelligent than anyone could be if they were simply wedded to a defensive political position.

But sometimes, as when he sets out to deflate the nostalgia associated with the Festival of Britain, he reveals he's not fully confident with his material. Herbert Read, the curator of the Festival of Britain's art exhibitions, had his prejudices but he didn't ignore more adventurous avantgarde artists such as Richard Hamilton simply because he favoured 'modernism as consensus, not dissonance'. He wasn't a prig, but an anarchist, and co-founded the ICA. Hamilton showed at the ICA in a satellite exhibition and artists such as Lynn Chadwick were included on the main site - and I'm not sure the now largely forgotten British sculptor can be fairly described as a 'modern romantic', or that in any case the term should be so dismissively applied.

What's more, when did working-class and lower-middle-class voters 'desert Blair in their droves'? Wasn't this, rather more, a predictable falling off after a decade of a New Labour government that didn't bring the Third Way utopia it had promised? Somehow Hatherley seems to want to link it all in with austerity (no mention of Iraq here). So why the hung parliament in 2010? And Blair stepped down in June 2007, when the credit crunch was barely a twinkle in an economist's eye.

The book is also prone to stylistic flabbiness: I found myself rereading chunks of it to work out what Hatherley was really getting at. And there are a few passing inaccuracies (the 7/7 bombings didn't happen in 2004, but 2005). You get the feeling that Hatherley wrote his five occasionally meandering chapters in a hurry; he probably did, since his last book, *Landscapes of Communism*, only came out last May.

But the meat of Hatherley's argument is pretty much intact. We're being sold a rose-tinted austerity past — a past that saw the creation of the NHS, improving the lives of working people incalculably — in order to promote a neoliberal Austerity Mark II, in which the poor are demonised. It's as simple as that. This is a book packed with intelligent insight, but I just wish Hatherley wasn't a writer in such a hurry.

The making of a legend Sarah Ditum

You Could Do Something Amazing with Your Life (You Are Raoul Moat)

by Andrew Hankinson, Scribe, £12.99, pp. 240, ISBN 9781922247919

For one week in July 2010, the aspiring spree killer Raoul Moat was the only news. 'Aspiring' because he didn't actually achieve his violent ambitions: by the time he died, he'd only managed to shoot three people (four if you include himself) and murder one (two if you count PC David Rathband, who was blinded by Moat and killed himself four years later).

But he made it, in a way. His self-constructed mythology had all the makings of a folk hero — working-class man, wronged by his woman, a grudge against the police — and there was a public ready to embrace him. Floral tributes were left outside his home and at the site of his suicide, and a Facebook page called 'RIP Raoul Moat You Legend!' attracted over 35,000 likes before it was removed. David Cameron obligingly ensured Moat's outlaw credentials by calling him a 'callous murderer, full stop' and declaring there should be 'no sympathy' for him.

Andrew Hankinson's account of the case is a direct challenge to the Prime Minister's words: 'You have nine days and your whole life to prove you are more than a callous murderer. Go.' The 'you' here is Moat, because the book is written entirely in the second person, using Moat's own recordings and letters to patch together the internal monologue of a killer; where Moat's account diverges from the factual record or clarification is needed, Hankinson adds a commentary within square brackets. We only know what Moat knew, so there is thankfully no interlude with Gazza and his fishing rod.

This device means that sympathy is inevitable: it is, as a matter of grammatical practicality, impossible to read a text in the second person without feeling some kind of identification with the 'you'. And this gives rise to the Dorothea problem. In chapter 29 of *Middlemarch*, George Eliot breaks off mid-sentence to ask: 'But why always Dorothea? Was her point of view the only possible one?' Why always Moat? Or, for that

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matter, why always men (Dorothea got the better part of the novel's central consciousness over her regrettable husband, but that is by no means typical)? And why so often men who kill?

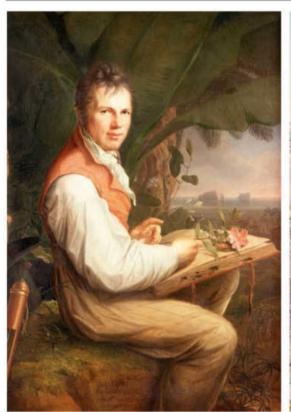
The Boston Strangler, Psycho, Peeping Tom: the mind of a killer is supposedly a terrible place, but a terribly attractive one too, with a great deal more fiction devoted to understanding male violence than to its victims. Highly publicised killers inspire more killers, and Moat is an object example. For Moat, as Hankinson tells us, Derrick Bird (who killed 12 people in Cumbria in June 2010) was 'a sign from God'. As American school shooters learn each other's lines, critiquing the methods and refining the results of their predecessors, so too middle-aged northern men with shotguns. Is it possible to write an account, as Hankinson has done, and not become a script for further murder?

The answer is yes. Critically, Hankinson is driven by genuine curiosity about his subject. Neither crass hagiography nor ignorant condemnation could deliver the answers he wants, and Moat's inner life is so extraordinarily deluded that it's arguable there is no way to understand it without standing inside. But every time the self-justifying diatribe takes hold, the square brackets tear a hole in the fabrications.

Moat believed he was the victim of a police vendetta; the square brackets tell us no, although he had a history of petty criminality and violence, especially towards women. Moat believed his girlfriend Sam had been cheating on him while he was in prison; the square brackets tell us she wasn't (not, of course, that cheating is a crime to be punished with a gunshot anyway). Moat says in his letters that he never hurt Sam; the square brackets tell us that he admitted elsewhere to hitting her.

The result is one of cumulative bathos, of which the title is a prime example. On the one hand, you could do something amazing with your life; but on the other, you're a belligerent paranoiac who refuses to seek psychiatric help. Moat's head feels like an authentically awful place to be trapped inside: he certainly hated himself, and by the time you know everything he did, and all the ways he hurt the people around him while casting himself as the victim, it's easy to sympathise fully with that self-loathing.

Before Moat started his underwhelming spree, at least four people knew what he was planning. Four people knew he intended to kill his ex-girlfriend and her partner Chris Brown (Moat's one fatality), and none of them thought to intervene: for them, this proprietorial violence fitted within the realm of the normal. Moat was an extreme example of something quite ordinary, and *You Could Do Something Amazing With Your Life* is an extraordinary study of violence, in all its bathos and banality.





Portrait of Alexander Humboldt by Friedrich Georg Weitsch; and (right) Humboldt talks to one of the indigenous people in Turbaco (today's Columbia) en route to Bogotá

Humboldt's gift Redmond O'Hanlon

The Invention of Nature: The Adventures of Alexander Humboldt, the Lost Hero of Science

by Andrea Wulf John Murray, £25, pp. 474, ISBN 9781848548985

The Prussian naturalist Alexander von Humboldt was once the most famous man in Europe bar Napoleon. And if you judge a man by his friends (as you should), how about Goethe, Schiller, Simon Bolivar, Cuvier, Lamarck, Laplace, Guy-Lussac and Jefferson? And that is only the start of the supper list.

So what happened? Why is he forgotten? For the best of reasons: because he contributed so much to so many fields of intellectual interest that are now separate scientific disciplines. And also because most of his ideas that were once startlingly original are now commonplace. We take it for granted that there are vast rivers running through the seas (but at least the Humboldt Current is named after him). He was the first oceanographer. He was the first ecologist.

The idea that as you climb up a mountain you make your way towards the poles, in terms of plant life, was his (a thought that came to him on his great climb of Chim-

borazo in the Andes, then by far the highest ascent that any human being had ever achieved). I followed a part of the journey he describes in perhaps his greatest work (Darwin's inspiration), *Personal Narrative of Travels to the Equinoctial Regions of the New Continent*, which, like its title, is too long, but I was astonished by its accuracy.

This magnificent biography has it all. But I'm ashamed to say that the story that really stays with me is of his stay in Quito. Humboldt was charismatic, handsome, packed with life. All the girls fell in love with him, including the great beauty Rosa Montúfar,

At the time, Humboldt's ascent of Chimborazo was the highest that any human being had achieved

daughter of the provincial governor. She dreamt of his proposal. But on the morning of Humboldt's departure she discovered that he had run off with her brother.

Andrea Wulf has a firm grasp of the history of science, but not of natural history: there are no apes in South America; anacondas, not boa-constrictors swim past the canoe, and tapirs are not pig-sized. Nevertheless, this is an exceptional biography of an extraordinary man. Wulf deserves our congratulations. It is now time to rediscover the abundant and diverse intellectual pleasures that Alexander von Humboldt can give us.

Escaping the Slough of despond

Andrew Taylor

Real Tigers

*by Mick Herron*John Murray, £16.99, pp. 352,
ISBN 9781473621213

Most spy novels have a comfortable air of familiarity. We readers can take moles in our stride. We have grown up with cutouts and dead letter boxes. There's little we don't know about angst-ridden, morally fallible spooks in raincoats and sharpsuited, gun-toting agents in casinos.

Mick Herron, however, takes a different approach from most other espionage writers. Real Tigers is the third novel in his 'Slow Horses' series. Its predecessor, Dead Lions, won the CWA Goldsboro Gold Dagger as the best crime novel of the year. The Slow Horses are a department made up of MI5 rejects — officers who have committed gross errors of judgment or made enemies of powerful figures in the organisation. ('Persona non grata,' muses one character.'...Latin for slow horse.')

These misfits are condemned to a hell of clerical work in the depressing surroundings of Slough House, near London's Barbican, in the hope that the sheer tedium will

Location

Old friends, we scarcely speak of death or dying. As ever, the displacements continue, just as when we used to fail to get round to speaking about love or confined ourselves to giving it a mention in letters — about which we didn't speak.

Until I knew better, I thought poets talked of such things, but as we see they share a guarded language of technical asides. If someone treats their work as a strip-tease, they back off, apparently confounded,

the action — the real conversation — being somewhere else — but where?

— Ian Harrow

force them to resign of their own free will. Among them are a cokehead, a compulsive gambler, an alcoholic and a breathtakingly unlovely computer nerd. At their head is Jackson Lamb, a foul-mouthed tyrant whose standards of courtesy and personal hygiene have much in common with those of Superintendent Andy Dalziel, the creation of the late and much lamented Reginald Hill.

The Slow Horses yearn to escape from drudgery and earn their return to the Park, MI5's palatial headquarters in Regent's Park, which glows in their memories like the Celestial City. Their chance comes when one of their number is kidnapped by a disgraced career soldier, one of the tigers of the title.

From this point the novel explodes like a firecracker in all directions. Is the kidnapping part of a plot by the new but strangely recognisable Home Secretary — described as 'a loose cannon with a floppy fringe and a bicycle' — to emasculate MI5 and ease himself into No.10? Or is it the byproduct of a dog-eat-dog power struggle within the organisation itself? Or does the cashiered soldier have his own agenda?

The narrative flips swiftly from view-point to viewpoint, gathering momentum as it builds towards a terrific climax in an abandoned industrial unit in Hayes. Many episodes have a cartoonish improbability — there's one scene, for example, when Jackson Lamb tries carol-singing and the nerd uses a double-decker bus as an offensive weapon. But it doesn't matter; Herron, like all good novelists, manufactures his own form of reality and persuades his readers to subscribe to it.

The satire is streaked with violence, which itself has elements of visual comedy. The dialogue is sharp and the prose is dark and sardonic. Underlying everything is a sense of outrage about the corruption within the Establishment.

This is not the sort of novel where you're likely to find positive portraits of Old Etonians. But if you read one spy novel this year, read *Real Tigers*. Better still, read the whole series.

No end to the Final Solution

Jonathan Steinberg

The Final Solution: The Fate of the Jews 1933–1949

by David Cesarani Macmillan, £30, pp. 1016, ISBN 9780230754560

David Cesarani, Research Professor of History at Royal Holloway University of London, died at the age of 58 on 25 October 2015. The book now appears without its author, a kind of huge mausoleum for an astonishing enterprise. Cesarani wants to change our view of the Holocaust and to close the

yawning gap between popular understanding of this history and current scholarship on the subject... to challenge the traditional concepts and periodisations ... the term itself.

He substitutes the 'Final Solution' for the Holocaust, but that Nazi term has become an alternative name for the Holocaust, which remains after 900 pages entirely unchallenged.

The first 235 pages take the persecution of Jews from the German defeat in the first world war to 1 September 1939, when Hitler's war began. The other chapters cover the history of the war and the extermination of the Jews of Europe to 1945, and then unusually into an epilogue and conclusion. These follow the history to 1949, as the horrors of war continue for Jews, who face pogroms in Poland and expropriation in most European countries. There is also frustration for those seeking to escape the camps — now under the Allies — to Israel or the USA.

The main thrust of the argument, and its claim to novelty, rests on the attempt to deny that Nazi anti-Jewish policy was 'systematic, consistent or even premeditated'. Nobody who has worked on German archives would deny that the Nazi state ran by a kind of 'Hobbesian war of all against all', as General Georg Thomas of the Wehrmacht economic section called it. There were more than a dozen competing Nazi agencies in occupied France alone, and only the Führer could adjudicate among them. Yet on the Final Solution there was no chaos. When the economic ministries complained that murdering the Jews of Ukraine — in effect, all the skilled craftsmen - would make exploitation of Ukrainian agriculture impossible, murdering of Jews continued. When SS Obergruppenführer Pohl wanted, in 1944, to protect the SS's own diamond-cutting business in a Dutch concentration camp, still the Jewish diamondcutters went to the gas chambers. Between 1933 and 1945, the methods used to rid society of Jews became more ambitious, but from 1919 to his death and his final will and testament, Hitler's goal - to eradicate the parasitic and destructive 'race' of Jews - never wavered. The efficient German bureaucracies carried that extermination process out without any reservation or objection.

The Anschluss took place on 12 March 1938. The German occupying troops were greeted by cheering Austrians with Nazi salutes, Nazi flags, and flowers. Cesarani corrects the *Sound of Music* image. A spontaneous and uncoordinated popular pogrom began. Aroused crowds took the law into their own hands and assaulted, looted and humiliated the very large Viennese Jewish population. As Cesarani notes:

The occupation of Austria and the despoliation of Austrian Jews was not a linear development of Nazi *Judenpolitik*. The one did not lead to the other. On the contrary, by accident Vienna turned into a laboratory for the implementation of radical new ideas that, once tried and tested, were imported back to Germany.

That is simply wrong. Austrian Nazis may have been unruly thugs who stole what



The SS deport Jews from the Warsaw ghetto

belonged to the German Reich, but they carried out, by mob violence, what orderly German bureaucrats would do without the mess. The most famous German legal scholars who had careers, as such, after 1945, wrote the Nuremberg Laws and explained how 'Hitler's will made law'. Nearly six million Jews were 'cleansed' from society in the midst of the greatest war in modern history without any serious opposition or any resistance by the state officials involved — a horrifying tribute to the virtues of German bureaucracy.

Cesarani's 'chaos' masks the deepest evil: its orderliness, its record-keeping, its lists of the dead, its exploitation of human remains, all carefully posted in ledgers. Gold teeth extracted from corpses were counted and carried to the Reichsbank every week by SS Hauptsturmführer Bruno Melmer, head of the Amtskasse-Hauptabteilung A/ II/3. (Office of the Cashier; Main Division, A/II/3). Melmer, dressed in civilian clothes, drove a small unmarked van. He delivered the gold teeth, watches, eye-glass frames and wedding rings to the Reichsbank, where they were credited to an SS account, sent to Degusa in Frankfurt, melted down and restamped in 12.5 kilogram bars with the seal of the Reichsbank.

The bars then went to the Swiss National Bank in Zürich, where they were exchanged for Swiss francs to finance Nazi purchases of raw materials. And so the bodily remains of victims financed the Nazi war effort in the same way as the theft of their assets, properties and household goods had done. Every

transaction found its place in the great ledgers of mass murder. The greatest theft in human history left complete accounts of the crimes, written in bureaucratic prose.

Cesarani's primary sources are entirely in English: 'For the sake of manageability and ease of access I have restricted my references to English language texts.' There is no evidence that Cesarani ever used any of the reports by the Wehrmacht and the SS which survived the war. Every pit-killing in Ukraine or White Russia was reported to Berlin, but all of these are in German. Certainly much is now available in English but the language of

Every transaction found its place in the great ledger of mass murder

the Nazi state, which one of Cesarani's most important witnesses, Victor Klemperer, studied as he lived under it, needs to be examined for the impersonality, the euphemisms and inhumanity of the Nazi world view.

Without German sources, the author cannot provide an explanation of the legalistic categories of German racial actions. The famous Wannsee Conference of 20 January 1942, at which the Final Solution of the Jewish Question became official Nazi policy, had been requested in part by the Ministry of Occupied Eastern Territories to establish guidelines for the categories of Jews in Ukraine and Belarus, as required by the Nuremberg Laws of 1935. Was it legal to murder half- and quarter-Jews?

The real novelty of the book comes

from the balance between victims and perpetrators, and here Cesarani makes a much more persuasive contribution. The fate of the Jews, and the development of Nazi treatment of them, play out as a counterpoint, subject to sudden shifts, as the politics before 1939 and the course of the war between 1939 and 1945 required. Vivid accounts of those who suffered, and equally lurid descriptions of those who inflicted the suffering, balance each other.

The descriptions of life in the Łodz and Warsaw ghettos reveal the existence of rich Jewish neighbourhoods, good restaurants and fancy clothes, as well as the filth, starvation and overcrowding of the masses. Emanuel Ringelblum, one of Warsaw ghetto's chroniclers, recorded bitterly that 'the inhumanity of the Jewish upper class has clearly shown itself'. We become familiar with the observers who kept diaries or wrote letters, and who died or disappeared as the murders continued. Cesarani has turned the numbers of victims into human stories with names. The 5,000 Christians in the Warsaw ghetto with their Christmas trees bear witness to their martyrdom. Baptism saved none of them.

Towards the end of the book Cesarani asserts that the final solution resembled the Reich war effort in 1942 — 'ill-planned, underfunded and carried through haphazardly at breakneck speed'. That is not my view; but disagreement, so common in historiography, would normally be occasion for a vigorous dialogue. Cesarini's untimely death has made that impossible.

ARTS

Public offence

Bad public art pollutes our townscapes. *Stephen Bayley* names and shames the worst offenders as he unveils the winner of The Spectator's inaugural What's That Thing? Award



A fusion of 'Fungus the Bogeyman' and Dungeons and Dragons, Dashi Namdakov's 'She Guardian' is a grotesque, inappropriate and embarrassing intrusion into London

There are, as adman David Ogilvy remarked, no monuments to committees. (That's not quite true; Auguste Rodin's 'Burghers of Calais' — you can find a version in Victoria Tower Gardens — is somewhat collectivist in subject matter.) But there are certainly abundant monuments to the committee mentality, the bureaucratic spirit and art-world groupthink. That is what most contemporary 'public art' amounts to.

You will have seen 'public art' if you wander through developments of luxury apartments on, say, the southbank Thames littoral between Lambeth and Battersea. Or on a progressive university campus anywhere. Sometimes public art is plonked on ringroad roundabouts in bleak development areas whence true inspiration and authentic industry have long since fled. Public art

may be hard to define, but it is always easy to detect: shrieking for attention, but pitiably inarticulate. Brash rather than brave. Assertive but dumb. Ham-fisted rather than skilful. Often expensive too.

It's a travesty since it almost always fails to win public acceptance and, at the same time, fails any reasonable test of what art might actually want to be. It satisfies only (a) corporate or municipal egos who commission the stuff to expiate their sweaty generalised guilt; (b) Section 106 of the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act, which gives property developers a break if they can demonstrate a 'planning gain'; or (c) the ambitions of an exclusive clique of 'art consultants' or for-hire curators and their client artists groomed only to respond to the narrow disciplines of (a) and (b).

The Spectator's What's That Thing?

Award for bad public art is the result of a year-long scrutiny of this pollution that is settling so balefully on the townscape. The aim is not to thwart creativity, nor to mock enlightened patronage. Nor is it intended to inhibit, through anticipatory fear of shame, any future initiative that contributes anything beautiful or thoughtful to public life. Instead, rather as Alfred H. Barr explained the purposes of New York's Museum of Modern Art, What's That Thing? simply wants to be resolute and conscientious in the distinction of quality from mediocrity. Modern public art can be magnificent: witness, Richard Serra in Broadgate. With this in mind, we can now name the very worst recent examples of public art in Britain.

Though ranking the candidates was as difficult as determining the precedence between lice and fleas, our bottom five is









Clockwise from top left: 'The Steelman' by Andy Scott; 'Horses' by Hamish Mackie; 'Alchemical Tree' by Simon Periton; 'Modern Marriage' by Simon Fujiwara

led, indisputably, by Dashi Namdakov's 'She Guardian' on Park Lane. Second is Andy Scott's 'The Steelman' in Ravenscraig, North Lanarkshire. Third, Simon Periton's 'Alchemical Tree' in Oxford. Fourth, Simon Fujiwara's 'Modern Marriage' in the Nine Elms crypto-linear park. Fifth, Hamish Mackie's 'Horses' in Goodman's Fields, Aldgate, in the City.

Namdakov, recipient of the High State Award of Mongolia, is a member of the Russian Union of Artists and his work often displays a residual influence of the blustering, flatulent stuff once favoured by dictators in and beyond the Soviet Union. Indeed, his 'She Guardian' replaces an earlier essay inspired by Genghis Khan. But, as if to avert charges of tyrannophilia, Namdakov's catalogue also includes sculptures of pussy-cats dozing on tree branches that would be at home in a giftshop in Alfriston. At least Hitler's Arno Breker had original genius.

Claiming a relationship to Mongol folk tradition, Namdakov's work is also, apparently, rooted in the iconography of Ray-

Public art may be hard to define, but it is always easy to detect: shricking for attention, but pitiably inarticulate

mond Briggs's Fungus the Bogeyman and Dungeons & Dragons. Muscles ripple, fangs do whatever fangs do. The occasional Buryat oligarch checking into the Dorchester for a Chinese meal and a Moldovan hooker might experience a pang, but this is (or was; it is currently on temporary loan to Tatarstan) a grotesque, inappropriate and embarrassing intrusion into London.

Namdakov's agent is the Halcyon Gallery, which has some unexplained arrangement with Westminster Council to showcase its lower-middlebrow rubbish.

Andy Scott's 'Steelman', which is meant to celebrate the lost industrial arts of the Motherwell region, is programmatic in a wearily literal way. Without nuance or subtlety, 'Steelman', which makes not even a half-hearted play towards the observer's higher faculties, succeeds only in mocking what it was intended to honour. The original northern iron and steelmen worked with practical and imaginative bravery in a new medium. A better client with a better artist might have made a tilt at appropriate novelty, poetry and soul. Instead, poor Ravenscraig has been given two-dimensional socialist realism in nursery-school style.

In Oxford, Simon Periton's 'Alchemical

Tree' is very different in that it is a threedimensional illustration of a tortuously contrived programme that has a connection to the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter where it is sited. He is a man much concerned with sites, as so many public artists tend to be, 'site-specific' being the current term for what was once called an installation. Periton's conceit of mottoes draped in an ash tree is, and I feel a stupefying wave of ennui as I write this, 'a symbol connected with ... interdisciplinary collaboration'.

Rather different is Simon Fujiwara's 'Modern Marriage', a gigantic amputated foot in the lee of a mountain range of overdesigned but insensitive apartments. Fujiwara, a Cambridge-educated architect, occasional cellist and full-time erotomane, is a credible figure, at least by the lights of Frieze and its wordy defences of artists-whodefy-categorisation. Indeed, he was selected for this site by the god-like curator Norman Rosenthal who, briefly returned to earth, has now, perhaps not in vain, swapped allegiance from Sir Joshua Reynolds's Royal Academy to Sean Mulryan's Ballymore Estates. The public viewer, with no access to Fujiwara's elaborate intellectual context, nor to Rosenthal's lofty tastes, sees only something gross and horrible.

Meanwhile, Hamish Mackie's 'Horses' is neither better nor worse than the sort of thing you see in the gardens of certain aspirational French hotels with one Michelin star, where animal sculpture and nymphs with pert nipples serve to distract customers from very expensive dinners. You want animal sculpture? Try Rembrandt Bugatti. You want an opinion on Hamish Mackie? Read André Derain, who suggested looking hard at nature, trying to reproduce it and then asking yourself if you are an imbecile. Put it this way: Mackie is no Bugatti and that's a pity for the public in Aldgate.

The results of the inaugural What's That Thing? Award synchronise, in a way Jung might have understood, with Historic England's Out There exhibition at Somerset House (until 10 April), an elegiac account of lost Festival of Britain Skylons, stolen Hepworths and Henry Moore's charming 'Old Flo', which Tower Hamlets simply could not wait to get rid of. The long moment of the postwar settlement was a good one for public art. Heartbreaking efforts such as Victor Pasmore's wonderful Apollo Pavilion at Peterlee New Town may have caused riots and been systematically vandalised by the public in whose name it was made, but the Forties, Fifties and Sixties at least offered a coherent raison d'être for the art: the edification of the public — the one Orwell described as having 'mild knobby faces' and 'bad teeth'. This purpose has been replaced by we know not what.

But What's That Thing? also coincides with the Prime Minister's announcement

of a Holocaust memorial to appear close to Rodin's 'Burghers'. What might it be? The great thing about the bad art of Namdakov, Scott, Periton, Fujiwara and Mackie is that it tells us what good art should be. It should never be dull or patronising. Nor should it excite sniggers or groans or winces. Good art can be difficult, contradictory, demanding and disturbing. It can be harrowing, beautiful or soothing. It should never be boring. And when you see it, you want more of it. That's the ultimate test that the winners of the What's That Thing? Award for bad public art all failed dismally.

Nominations are now open for the worst piece of public art of 2016. Email your candidates to publicart@spectator.co.uk

Dance Unforgettable fire Ismene Brown

Until The Lions

Akram Khan Company, Roundhouse

Rhapsody

Royal Ballet, Royal Opera House

How much of a compromise does a fashionable choreographer loved by all have to make with his paymasters? When he's unfashionable, it's only the Arts Council he has to please. When the world wants a piece of him, he has London's Sadler's Wells and the Roundhouse, Grenoble, Paris, Luxembourg, Montreal, Hong Kong, Taipei, Wolfsburg, Brighton, Amiens, Bruges, Amsterdam, Rheims and Leicester producers all tugging at his sleeve, offering support for the quasi-divine creation but wanting to get their spanner into the works somewhere.

In which light I take my hat off to Khan. A fortnight after seeing his Until The Lions at the Roundhouse, ground down at the time by pain and dulled by medicine, and fussing over every fault, I find myself now remembering and chewing over some of those sights and impressions. Sponsoritis can no doubt be blamed for the self-conscious artificiality of happy-clappy fusion musicians around the stage. The Roundhouse is a pretty dangerous place to put dance in. The proximity of our faces all around the little circular arena, reading the programme, checking our phones, has nothing like the antique intensity of illiterate villagers gathered to hear the travelling storytellers in the street.

But there were gorgeous, visionary sights such as only Akram can do. A scampering animal spirit, a world split and riven by fire and danger, a woman going up in flames, a stern, lamentational love duet of mighthave-been, and everywhere, glistening, the tiny kathak-specific foot- and fingerwork of his background. Tim Yip (who designed the awesome *DESH* for Khan) has created a fantastic huge stump of an ancient ringed tree, split and unstable, its sections heaving with subterranean gusts and fires produced by lighting wizard Michael Hulls.

The hub of great theatre choreography is to envisage what imaginings certain combinations of movement, picture and sound will produce in the spectator. The 13-year-old Khan was chosen by Peter Brook to play the boy who hears the story in his famed *Mahabharata* staging, to be the audience, and I suppose that child's experience of beholding is what rubbed off on me—the feeling that while the story did not have to be comprehensible at first telling, it had ideas and episodes so telling that in time they would emerge as the story.

The tale focuses on the revenge of the underdogs in the *Mahabharata*, the women. Amba, abducted by the desirable but celibate Bheeshma for his brother, is rejected by her true love, who takes the still current male attitude that his sexual property is now defiled. Interestingly, Amba decides

There were gorgeous, visionary sights such as only Akram can do

it's Bheeshma who should pay for the wrong, rather than the antediluvian boy-friend, and sets herself on fire in order to be reborn as a warrior alter ego who shall kill Bheeshma. Of course, their final battle is one of love, too, and the world itself is shaken by the war.

If this sounds a bit Tolkieny, why not? So is Wagner's *Ring* cycle. The imagery here explodes from tightly compressed visions. Khan choreographs sweet, wronged Amba with windblown fragility, exploiting the contrast between dancer Ching-Ying Chien's long heavy black hair and her tiny, papery hands. When she immolates herself, it's choreographed in a boiling stillness, unlike the ferocious shaking with which Khan sent himself up in flames in *Gnosis*, his 2010 production also based on *Mahabharata* mythology.

It struck me watching Christine Joy Ritter prowling alertly on all fours as Amba's spirit self Shikhandi that (a) you almost never see a choreographer make dancers impersonate animal movements for serious reasons, and (b) it is disturbing. She and Chien incarnate mythic rather than emotionally familiar properties, while Khan as Bheeshma exudes hot temper and regret.

And while we're saying loud goodbyes to great ballet dancers, Khan, now 41, who has announced he is to retire in 2018, is also irreplaceable in my memory, so uplifting and strange is his power in spins and footspeed, and so magnetic his self-awareness as a performer.

Khan shares with Mikhail Baryshnikov a quality of the miraculous: Baryshnikov, the Russian who made the impossible look normal, to whom Frederick Ashton paid tribute in his breathtaking ballet *Rhapsody*, currently at the Royal Ballet. Set to Rachmaninov's smoochy piano concertante, the *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, its immense technical detailing is not enough on its own; it requires an ironic devilry, which eluded the sobersided youngster James Hay in the first cast, but Steven McRae's narcissistic tendencies work wonderfully here.

The two ballerinas cast — both of them staggering but unfinished talents — offer a fascinating snapshot of home-grown styling ν . bought-in. In Francesca Hayward the Royal Ballet has a potentially miraculous asset, but *Rhapsody* showed that she isn't yet as precise or fast of foot as Ashton needs. Hayward is still a Clara waiting to become a Sugar Plum Fairy. Whereas Natalia Osipova, the Russian self-starter, is a natural skitterer, a dazzling stage creature, and makes the choreography hers. Who cares about the risks, she seems to quip, as she darts delightedly around the stage.

Cinema It's doomed! Deborah Ross

Dad's Army

U, Nationwide

The TV sitcom Dad's Army ran on the BBC from 1968 to 1977 (nine series, 80 episodes) with repeats still running to this day (Saturday, BBC2, 8.25 p.m.) and I sometimes watch these repeats with my dad (92) and we laugh like idiots and I sometimes watch with my son (23) and we laugh like idiots and sometimes the three of us watch together (combined age 169, should that be of interest) and we all laugh like idiots but I was not minded to laugh like an idiot during this film, possibly because I was not minded to laugh at all. If it ain't broke, don't fix it, goes the saying, and while this isn't something you're ever told by Carphone Warehouse when it's begging you to upgrade, it would have proved good advice in this instance, should anyone have wished to hear.

I had my initial reservations, as did we all, I expect. Indeed, when I first heard there was going to be a big-screen update my gut reaction said, 'No, no, no'. And also, 'No'. Followed by, 'No'. But then, fool that I am, the cast list was announced and I perked up enormously. The casting is a dream as it's Toby Jones (Mainwaring), Bill Nighy (Wilson), Tom Courtenay (Jones), Michael Gambon (Godfrey), Bill Paterson (Frazer),



Dream team: the cast of 'Dad's Army' 2016

Daniel Mays (Walker) and Blake Harrison (Pike). It could work, became my thinking. You can't gather all that talent — Gambon! As Private Godfrey! — and have it come to nothing, became my thinking. But then, fool that I am, I did not factor in a feeble script, endless pointless slapstick and the sort of ooh-er-missus humour that wrings every double entendre it can from 'roly-poly' and then returns for more. (I like roly-poly, but not *that* much.)

Directed by Oliver Parker (Johnny English Reborn), and written by Hamish McColl (Johnny English Reborn, Paddington and, for theatre, The Play What I Wrote), the film takes us back to Walmington-on-Sea, 1944, and our home guard platoon, as led by Captain Mainwaring. (Toby Jones imitating Arthur Lowe, but then Mainwaring wouldn't be Mainwaring if you didn't imitate Arthur Lowe, so there's no way round that.) Here, the jeopardy has been upped in that there is a Nazi spy (Catherine Zeta-Jones) in their midst, not that they know she's a Nazi spy, as she is masquerading as Rose Winters, a journalist from The Lady. But the trouble is, we know her for what she is, so we must simply wait for everyone else to play catchup. And wait. And wait. It is so overstretched it's properly painful.

Rose is, of course, a femme fatale, creating rivalries all over the place. She turns Wilson's head and Mainwaring's head and Pike's head and any head going, basically. This even leads to one of those farce scenes during which her various admirers hide behind sofas and doors and leap out of windows. Any nuance from the original series is entirely absent as it insists on making the covert overt. Pike, for exam-

ple, is openly acknowledged as Wilson's son, while Wilson is openly acknowledged as sharper than Mainwaring. (In the series, Wilson would have a good idea, which he'd then let Mainwaring claim, and this gave their relationship real pathos and depth.) They have also brought Mrs Mainwaring (Felicity Montagu) on screen for no good reason, which ruins that particular joke — never seeing Mrs Mainwaring, for all those 80 episodes, was the point of her.

There is no vulnerability to any of the characters, who are disappointingly indistinguishable anyhow. Bill Paterson's Frazer, for example, is not especially lugubrious, while Tom Courtenay's Jones is not

The only decent moment occurs when the out-takes are played over the end credits

especially excitable. Meanwhile, Nighy is Nighy while Harrison simply reprises his dimwitted role from *The Inbetweeners*. Best, by far, is Gambon! As Private Godfrey! He makes Godfrey sweetly adorable, at least. And in a supporting role, Sarah Lancashire as Mavis Pike does try to add emotional heft, but it only ever amounts to a sliver.

With the various catchphrases popping up clunkily whenever and wherever — 'we're all doomed!', 'stupid boy!', 'don't panic!' — this always feels horribly contrived. The only decent moment, in fact, occurs when the out-takes are played over the end credits and we see Gambon's mobile going off in a scene, and everyone stays in character, and it's genuinely funny. So here's my advice: ask to see this film backwards and then don't stay for long.



Woman on the verge of a nervous breakdown: Gina McKee as The Mother

Theatre Being and nothingness Lloyd Evans

The Mother

Tricycle Theatre, until 5 March

Jeepers Creepers

Leicester Square Theatre, until 20 February

Florian Zeller has been reading Pinter. And Pinter started out in repertory thrillers where suspense was created by delaying revelations until the last minute. He tried an experiment. Suppose you delay the revelations indefinitely. The results were interesting. Pinter's characters were vague, stark silhouettes lacking background and substance. Audiences found them inscrutably suggestive. Zeller follows suit. He presents us with a bourgeois marriage. The father works. The mother sits at home being stylishly empty-headed. Their grown-up son lives with his girlfriend. No other details are offered. It's evening. Mother, disported on an all-white sofa, greets her husband and languidly interrogates him about his day's activities and casts aspersions on his fidelity. He refuses to confirm or deny her accusations.

The son pays a visit. Did that nasty girlfriend kick you out? asks the Mother. She pours poison in his ear about the girlfriend's multifarious sexual indiscretions. This is all very weird and amusing. Then it becomes incredible. The Mother puts on her foxiest scarlet dress and begs her son to take her out on a hot date. Chic restaurants and dance clubs are suggested. Clearly the woman is loopy. This resolves a question posed by the surroundings. The house is obsessively white. The walls, the floor, the furniture, and the plain linen jimjams favoured by the Mother, are as bleached-out as a padded cell. The girlfriend arrives. She's beautiful and knows it. That's all we learn about her.

And there you have the play. Three blank gestures supporting a nutcase. Instead of living up to Pinter's oblique strangeness Zeller declines into oddball banality. The dad is a baffled scowl, the girlfriend is a preening minx and the son is a self-regarding tumescence. The Mother, being off her head, is licensed to do or say anything because the author has disclaimed any need to provide her with rational motives. And he gets tricksy. He shows us two scenes (a failed strangulation and an adulterous grope), which he then retracts on the understanding that they were 'dream sequences'. Even primary-school children are warned against using

this device. With good reason. Watching a play (or reading a book) is a creative act. The viewer labours to generate sympathy with the characters, to imagine that the storyline is real, and to be aroused by the emotions on display. To trifle with that effort, to erase its accumulations of energy and involvement, is to commit a breach of trust.

Zeller writes like one of those tinkering football managers who substitutes the top-scorer and then replaces the substitute. The crowd on press night fidgeted, coughed and thumb-twiddled as the 90-minute jape drew to a close. But I predict great things for *The Mother*. It has the biddable imprecision of conceptual art. And because it means nothing every opinion about it is correct. That's the secret of success: tell the audience they're infallible.

Robert Ross's play Jeepers Creepers offers us scenes from the life of Marty Feldman. He was the co-author, with Barry Took, of the hit radio show Round the Horne and he contributed to one of British comedy's greatest achievements, the four Yorkshireman sketch. His appearance as Igor in Mel

The Mother amounts to three blank gestures supporting a nutcase. But I predict great things for it

Brooks's Young Frankenstein propelled him to the heights of international stardom. Men found him hilarious and unthreatening. To women he was irresistible. He began hanging out with Keith Moon and Sam Peckinpah while he directed and starred in his own movies. David Boyle plays Feldman as a loveable, wisecracking drifter and though he captures the warm, comfortable voice very well he can't get the crackle and electricity of his presence.

The Feldman spirit proves inimitable. And that famous mug is a bit of a challenge as well. To suggest his bulgy left eye would take an extraordinary feat of prosthesis. To suggest his even bulgier right eye would take a miracle. This play isn't in that league. Ex-Python Terry Jones directs the script with film-like subtlety and quietness. The tragedy unfolds at a low murmur. Feldman drinks whisky night and day, even while directing the surreal farce The Last Remake of Beau Geste. Yet he never seems to get inebriated or even merry. The closing scene shows him alone in a hotel in Mexico chatting amiably to his wife over the phone while his latest project, Yellowbeard, falls to pieces. The film was the brainchild of Graham Chapman, who assembled a list of stars including Peter Cook, John Cleese, Spike Milligan, Eric Idle, James Mason and David Bowie. It was a disaster. Feldman hears that 'Cleese has walked' and realises that the film is about to crash and burn. He sets off for England but succumbs to a heart attack. He was 48. But it wasn't just the whisky. He chuffed his way through 36,500 cigarettes every year.

peter brown



Regent Street, from Gant, Summer, 2015 oil on canvas 64 x 76 cms 25 x 30 ins

Peter's images of our capital are neither strictly topographical as, say, those by the eighteenth-century artist Thomas Shotter Boys. Nor, despite their clear human interest, are they quite Hogarthian. But there is nevertheless a touch of both artists in his work.

Architecturally, his paintings are exacting impressions of a bustling community going about its business in all weathers. Working quickly, he is able to catch the very essence of the moment, making his pictures highly skilled impressions of everyday city life. But each painting has a personal touch, because Peter engages with his audience, often to such a degree that passersby return, hoping to find themselves included within the scene. DM

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'Untitled (Oxidation Painting)', 1978, by Andy Warhol

Exhibitions 'So quick and chancy' Martin Gayford

Andy Warhol: Works from the Hall Collection

Ashmolean Museum, until 15 May

Tom Wesselmann:Collages 1959–1964

David Zwirner, London, until 24 March

When asked the question 'What is art?', Andy Warhol gave a characteristically flip answer ('Isn't that a guy's name?'). On another occasion, however, he produced a more thoughtful response: 'Does it really come out of you or is it a product? It's complicated.' Indeed, it's those complica-

tions that make Warhol's works compelling, as is demonstrated by a new exhibition at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

One is that it is hard to tell how much he was really in control. When you look at one of his pictures, are you really looking at the work of his assistants or, indeed, of chance? And the way he forces you to think about that makes you ponder other kinds of art as well. Warhol manages — a characteristic trick — to be simultaneously superficial and profound.

This is not a full retrospective, or even close to one. It all comes from a single private source, the Hall Collection, which means that many celebrated categories of Warhol's work are omitted entirely. There are no Marilyns, no Elvis Presleys, no electric chairs. But the omission of so much instantly recognisable stuff makes it easier to see what was so original and — in a way — so traditional about what he did.

He shows us the faces of the famous, and that is a reminder of how much art consists of famous faces — kings, saints, gods. Then he repeats them, so you see a whole stack of Chairman Mao, for example, some of which are slightly different from the others. And you respond somehow to those little differences — do they mean anything?

In silk-screening Warhol found a method of making pictures by copying photographs that also generated random variations. One would be lighter, one darker, one smeared, or with the colours out of register. He would produce whole series in this way; the best part of a wall at the Ashmolean, for example, is covered with multiple versions of Joseph Beuys, in alternative colourways. It was the mistakes he liked about the system: he was thrilled because it was 'so quick and chancy'.

Warhol was obsessed by movie stars and celebrities, but he was also fascinated by randomness. There are works on show

Like many iconoclasts and revolutionaries Warhol turns out to have been a closet traditionalist

in Oxford that represent shadows, a Rorschach inkblot and cloudy stains caused by urinating on specially prepared paint (Warhol claimed not to have the heart to explain this technique to some old ladies at an exhibition, 'especially as their noses were right up against them').

Matisse famously advised those who wanted to take up art first to cut out their tongues. Warhol didn't do that, but nor did he give much away about the meanings of his works. He preferred wit and gossip. Over dinner, David Bowie once told me about his first meeting with the artist, who was then considerably more famous than he was — this was in 1971. Bowie began by telling Warhol how much he admired his work. There followed an awkward silence, until eventually Warhol lent across and confided, 'I really like your shoes!' After that, according to Bowie, conversation flowed more freely.

It is no accident that one of Warhol's final projects was a series of variations on Leonardo's 'Last Supper' (nor that, despite the ironies and outrages, Warhol was a devout, mass-attending Catholic). Like many iconoclasts and revolutionaries he turns out, on closer examination, to have been a closet traditionalist.

The same could be said of the other major American pop artists. A photograph in the Oxford catalogue shows them all lined up in 1964: Warhol, James Rosenquist, Claes Oldenburg and Tom Wesselmann. Of those Wesselmann (1931–2004) is perhaps the least familiar in this country, but an exhibition of his early work at the David Zwirner gallery suggests he is an artist more subtle and complex than first appears.

He tends to be known, if at all, for a series, collectively entitled 'The Great American Nude', which might be described as modernism meets *Playboy*.

This delightful show catches Wesselmann in the late Fifties and early Sixties, just at the point of emerging into maturity. The little collages (see p33) displayed in the downstairs gallery are engaging interiors plus a still life or two in which the intimacy of a Vuillard or Bonnard is spliced with a bit of American directness (and occasionally what look like bits of the Stars and Stripes). The results are sophisticated but with folksy touches. As you look, you understand how Wesselmann's nudes, apparently so brash, are descended from those of Matisse.

Opera Straight talking Michael Tanner

L'Étoile

Royal Opera House, in rep until 24 February

Orpheus in the Underworld

St John's Smith Square

It's widely agreed that the most difficult form of opera to bring off is operetta, whether of the Austro-German or the French tradition — interesting that the Italians wisely eschew the genre (so far as I know), while the British stay with G&S and their inviolable traditions, including the audience's laughing in all the right places. In the past four days I have been to two performances of French operetta, neither of them much of a success, for quite different reasons.

Opera Danube is a young company devoted to nurturing singers who recently graduated from one or another of the many music schools. It works with the Orpheus Sinfonia, a small orchestra of players at the same stage of their careers. Its artistic director Andrew Dickinson reminds us in the programme that times are hard, even harder than usual, for young musicians. When I think of the innumerable fine singers I have seen in productions at the RCM, RAM and the Guildhall School, and how many of them have never been heard again, I can only feel amazement that anyone even tries. However, Opera Danube does itself no favours by regarding St John's Smith Square as its spiritual home (Dickinson's words). It is a deep and lofty building, in which speech turns into mere incomprehensible echo, so that the narration and dialogue in Offenbach's Orpheus in the Underworld got lost. The production was semi-staged, with, so far as I could tell, decent singers who in a different, more intimate acoustic might have made more of an impression. They might usefully be taught the first rule of operetta, indeed of all comedy: PLAY IT STRAIGHT. The narrator, who doubled as Jupiter, and trebled as the director, was Simon Butteriss, an immensely experienced singer, writer and actor in opera, musicals and recitals. His polished performance gave, I'm sure without intention, the impression of someone bent on upstaging everyone else in the cast, and wasn't helped by being so camp that it seemed to belong to a different kind of entertainment. Still, it goes without saving that this work is a masterpiece, especially its brief last act, where the performance finally gave an indication of what this company might achieve.

It does not go without saying that Chabrier's L'Étoile is a masterpiece, and unfortunately the production at the Royal Opera, its first there, is not likely to win it many converts. For one thing, the size of the theatre is quite inappropriate for this intimate work, the scoring of which has many of the felicities that one expects from this composer, but which don't make their mark, even when played with such care and lucidity as Mark Elder achieved. For once the main attraction of the evening was the ever-mobile and enchanting scenery, two-

L'Étoile refutes the view that with adequate music the plot can be as silly and unfollowable as it likes

dimensional but cute and sometimes witty. But one should be on the alert when it is felt to be necessary to have such visual busyness, accommodating singers in Near Eastern costumes, and most of them, I'm relieved to say, not hamming it up.

This opera definitively refutes the view that with adequate music the plot can be as silly, confused and unfollowable as it likes. You can't have characters in whom you take any kind of interest without there being a context for their behaviour, including the music they sing. The plot of L'Etoile is impossible to follow — I read four summaries of it, each of them quite different, but all equally inane. Another danger signal is that the characters sport such names as Tapioca, Siroco, King Ouf, and Hérisson de Porc-Épic. We are in the world of Gallic facetiousness, which it seems, surprisingly, Chabrier failed to recognise as being as wearisome as it is. He loved many kinds of mischief and comedy, was a purveyor of them often in brilliant music, but without any taste in libretti. It was interesting to note that the Royal Opera's audience laughed conscientiously as often as it could until the interval, but then for the longer second half went quiet, hoping that L'Etoile would accumulate a momentum that simply isn't there. The only enjoyment, for me, was in the lovely performance by

Kate Lindsey of Lazuli, a trouser role that she carried through with exquisite poise and taste, singing arias of a semi-seriousness that carry more conviction than the naughty sprightliness of much of the score. A pedlar who ends up as Ouf's chosen successor, Lazuli largely sidesteps the tiresome main action. Ouf, the sadistic king who celebrates his name day by executing a citizen who has spoken ill of him, has rather little to sing, and Christophe Mortagne's performance didn't make one regret that, being painfully short of top notes. There are two imported characters in this production, an archetypal Englishman and Frenchman, Dupont and Smith, who enact clichés about their respective countries. They added, I'm afraid, to the effect of laboriousness which made this short opera seem like a grim foretaste of eternity.

Radio Terry's all gold Kate Chisholm

For once, the superlatives that have greeted Terry Wogan's death from cancer have been entirely in keeping with the man. He did truly touch the lives of millions, understanding that the essence of radio, what makes it so individual among technologies, is the way it connects us, person to person, in a single moment of time. Wogan had the knack of making us believe that we were having a private conversation with him in that moment. In his own way he was also an artist, of language, of the music of words, of radio itself, constantly surprised by the strangeness of strangers, the oddities of everyday life, the idiocy that lurks beneath most big organisations.

Long before Twitter or Facebook, he understood back in the 1970s that for his breakfast show on Radio 2 to have a real impact he needed to create a kind of continuous conversation with his listeners from day to day. Not just by establishing his own inventive running gags but by getting them to send in their thoughts, happenings, comments. Wogan fed off his listeners, his 'TOGs' as they liked to be known, his 'Old Geezers and Gals' (among whom no less than the Queen was proud to number herself). And they in turn fed off him, wanting more of him and less of the music, so appealing was his take on life, his irreverent commentary on the news and on what they had sent him in sackfuls of post.

'You have allowed me to share your lives with you,' he told us tearfully in his farewell broadcast on Radio 2 in 2009 (he carried on with a weekend show until last November). And he did, reading out his listeners' messages, chatting with them on air, mak-

ing them feel as important as he was himself. That was his enduring appeal; you never felt he was talking himself up or taking the mickey for the sake of a soundbite or a bit of self-promotion. It was all about cheering up the world not by avoiding its ugliness but by providing the most important antidote: unaffected, straight-from-the-heart, personto-person communication.

Just to prove that there are many different ways of carving out a career on radio, one of Wogan's fellow-presenters at Radio 2, Vanessa Feltz, was a guest on *A Good Read* this week (Radio 4, Tuesday). Feltz has her own ardent band of listeners, drawn in by her energy, her motormouth style, never lost for a word, always willing to use ten words where one is quite sufficient. Her effervescence is catching, if at times a little exhausting, as is her quick-witted way of looking at the world. Listening to her is like being whisked along by Eurostar rather than trundling through the countryside on a two-carriage branch line.

She was talking about a little-known novel by Dodie Smith (of 101 Dalmatians fame). But the fascination of this episode of the Radio 4 staple (now almost 30 years old and a must-listen for anyone on the look-out for their next good read) was not so much Feltz's choice of book, which to my ears sounded as if it could be a trifle disappointing, but the energy with which she gave us her opinion. This is a woman who must never sleep — her Radio 2 show starts daily at 5 a.m., after which she trundles across to Radio London to mastermind their three-hour peak-time show, which starts at 7 — and yet she never sounds tired or harassed or jaded. Who else would describe Smith's A Tale of Two Families as having 'a surface deliquescence of exquisiteness'? Or denounce Hilary Mantel's Beyond Black, which was the choice of the presenter Harriett Gilbert, as exuding 'some kind of hideous odour' which she feared leaving on her bedside table in case it poisoned her while she slept?

On Sunday morning, there was one of those radio moments when something happens on air that makes you stop whatever you are doing to listen with full attention. The news on Radio 4 had just finished and the next thing I heard was a solo voice singing unaccompanied the first words of 'Amazing Grace'. Who was that singing with such burning intensity?

The voice it turned out belonged to a long-term prisoner in Long Lartin prison in Worcestershire, a high-security jail for those whose crimes are deemed of maximum threat to society. We could not of course be told the prisoner's name but boy could he sing those lines, 'I once was lost but now am found.' Was blind, but now I see.'

The service that followed for Sunday Worship (produced by Philip Billson) allowed several of the prisoners to tell their stories, of how they had struggled to live with the knowledge of what they had destroyed and could not replace. Most of them know that they will never get out except through death. The chaplains, from all faith groups and none, have to help them cope and to provide unconditional support. I was left wondering what life in Long Lartin sounded like beyond the chapel but within those walls at least there was hope and some amazing singing.

Television Weekend world Iames Walton

When the time comes to make programmes looking back on the 2010s, I wonder which aspects of life today will seem the weirdest. Quinoa? The fact that we were expected to be 'passionate' about our jobs? Being so overexcited by new technology that we constantly stared at phones? Or maybe it'll just be how many almost identical TV series looking back on previous decades we used to watch: the kind where a family dresses up in period costume and lives for a while like people from previous eras, carefully ticking off the signifiers as they go. (Space hoppers and Chopper bikes for the Seventies, Rubik's Cubes and shoulder pads for the Eighties.)

The latest example — following the likes of *Back in Time for Dinner*, *Back in Time for Christmas*, *Turn Back Time: The Family* and *Turn Back Time: The High Street* — is *Back in Time for the Weekend* (BBC2, Tuesday), where even the title's promise of a slightly different focus didn't last for long. At the start, presenter Giles Coren proudly announced that the series would bring us '50 years of British weekends', but in the first episode, set in the Fifties, once the weekend was over, the programme rolled on to the rest of the week with neither a pause nor an explanation.

There is, mind you, no doubting the commitment of the family involved. For their trip back to the original Austerity Britain, the Ashby Hawkinses not only donned the requisite hats and National Health specs, but also allowed their house to be ripped apart and reconfigured in best make-do-andmend chic. And they were a good choice in other ways too. In real life, mum Steph is the breadwinner, which meant that it came as a bit of a shock when she realised she'd be doing 11 hours of chores a day while her husband Rob sat in a chair pretending to smoke a pipe. They're also a likeable and articulate foursome, especially the precocious Seth, a 12-year-old boy much given to furrowing his brow and ruminating on the shifting nature of social expectations.

Given the unshakeable devotion of

these programmes to received wisdom, startling revelation was duly in short supply. Then again, perhaps their main function is to provide comfort rather than fresh information, not just by reciting all over again the commonly agreed version of postwar British life in a sort of historical equivalent of communal hymn-singing, but also by assuring us how marvellous life is today compared with more benighted times. So it was that the Fifties got their usual kicking for being dull and conventional as well as sexist - until liberation came in the form of washing machines and rock'n'roll. Still, at least Seth enjoyed himself as he camped in the woods with friends, cooking Spam and warming the hearts of any parents watching by explaining how unexpectedly nice it was to get away from a computer screen.

But if you really wanted to see how much life had changed — not least for women — just 30 years after all that Fifties repression, one way was to watch *The Most Dangerous Band in the World: The Story of Guns N' Roses* (BBC Four, Friday). Whereas 16-year-old Daisy Ashby Hawkins was instructed

The drummer's girlfriend agreed to be recorded having noisy sex with Axl Rose as part of the track 'Rocket Queen'

in the decorous art of ballroom dancing to have her Fifties fun, here we met Adriana Smith, a stripper and girlfriend of the band's drummer who agreed to be recorded having noisy sex with the lead singer Axl Rose as part of the 1987 track 'Rocket Queen'. 'I did it for the band,' she explained, 'and for a bottle of Jack Daniel's.'

Strippers, in fact, proved something of a motif, providing the band with companionship, booze and on-stage dancing that took Guns N' Roses shows 'to the next level'. But of course, there were plenty of other classic rock tales as well. Personally, I particularly liked Axl wanting to buy his own army in Guatemala, and his continuing belief that when the guitarist Slash's heart stopped for eight minutes on the carpet of an LA hotel, the man's soul left his body in the form of a crow and a replacement soul entered that has been in place ever since. And Axl was the abstemious one — unlike, say, bassist Duff McKagan, who at one stage gave up heroin and started drinking ten bottles of wine a day instead. Slash himself, incidentally, was careful to stick to a daily ration of four pints of vodka, but that was before he went out for the evening.

Ninety minutes of this stuff made for a grimly riveting and — let's face it — often entertaining watch. Yet, by the end, I suspect that even the most ardent fans of rock excess might have found themselves wondering if there's something to be said for the boring old Fifties after all.



NOTES ON ...

South Africa

By Will Heaven

here are plenty of places to fly to for winter sun, but only one place that offers five-star hotels for the price of a B&B in Lyme Regis. South Africa has always been good value for British visitors, even five years ago when there were 11 rand to the pound. Now that figure is closer to 23 rand. For visitors, an entire country is half price. This freak situation may not last; so there might never be a better time to visit.

The choices are almost overwhelming — safaris, Anglo-Zulu battlefield tours, scenic drives in the Drakensberg mountains — but Cape Town is a wonderful place to start. There's a comfortingly British feel to the city: the surfer dudes and the beachside bars and restaurants of Camps Bay wouldn't look out of place on Cornwall's north coast.

You can go anywhere in South Africa and buy delicious street food for a pittance — but what distinguishes Cape Town is its world-class restaurants. Nine of us, family and friends, went out last week to visit my sister, who is very helpfully a travel agent there. We'd troop out for a big lunch by the beach — cocktails, beers, calamari; the full works — and the bill would come to £15 a head. Every time you're presented with a bill in South Africa, it looks like a mistake. You feel almost guilty signing it. But it's a feeling that you can quickly get used to. One night we went to the



Camps Bay: its beachside restaurants would be at home in Cornwall — apart from the prices

Roundhouse, perhaps one of the best restaurants in Cape Town. We indulged in an eight-course taster menu, each dish paired with a local Stellenbosch wine. £50 a head, that cost, and we were splashing out.

The drawback for any British tourist is all the other British tourists. On the next table next to us in the Roundhouse, some Brits got carried away by it all and starting singing Abba. It's a sore point for the locals. During the Test matches the Barmy Army have been singing '23 rand to the pound, 23 rand to the pound'. They were quieter than

usual in the stands, though — half of them were ensconced further back in the boxes and executive suites.

The other drawback is getting there. Cape Town is 6,000 miles away from London and the air fare can be pricey. I went via Dubai on Emirates for about £650, but my advice would be not to. You end up spending 17 hours on two planes, plus ages on buses around Dubai's vast airport. It's best to fly direct and risk a last-minute ticket: a friend did this recently with British Airways for £700. Then enjoy the extraordinary land-scapes, the warm weather and the beaches.

Make sure you hire a car and driver from £40 (or just a car for £15), and spend a day tasting in the winelands (each vinevard offered a session for about a pound a head, as did the Van Ryn's brandy distillery). While you're at it, offer a sarcastic toast to Jacob Zuma. The South African president is a disaster who has been destroying Mandela's legacy and his country's economy. He's the reason your trip will be so cheap. The happiest I saw my South African friends was when a hawker approached the car at some traffic lights with a #Zumamustfall bumper sticker. 'Yes,' one fist-pumped, 'it's catching on.' Until Zuma does fall, there's frankly only one thing you can do to help out the poor South Africans: go to Cape Town and spend.

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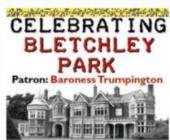
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— Tanya Gold, p70

LIFE

High life Taki



Athens

Viewed from Mars, this is a sunny, peaceful city. Up close, however, things ain't what they used to be. First, those wonderful Greek smiles are gone, replaced by wintry ones at best. People are worried, as well they should be. At the Divani Caravel hotel, once owned by yours truly, the staff greet me as though I were a conquering hero. I was a benevolent owner who used to party and spread the wealth. Now things are more professional, and the hotel is profitable because of expert management. The staff is the best in Athens by far.

The migrant crisis is secondary, from what I hear. Pension reform and the country's creditors are on a collision course, with daily strikes impeding any growth to an economy that's hit rock-bottom. It will get worse, as it is an intractable gridlock. How can an economy grow and pay its debts when it is in austerity's python-like grip? For python read Angela Merkel. This woman, who has stated that 'the right to political asylum has no limits on the number of asylum seekers', should obviously be shot without a blindfold, the trouble being that no one shoots women any longer except for Isis and its ilk. Slovakia and Hungary have been wise to tell economic migrants and the EU to shove it, but poor Greece is on the front line, as is Italy. No one expects Turkey not to undermine Greece, just as no one can count on Libya to spare Italy.

I flew into Athens for two concerts by Israel's national orchestra conducted by the great Zubin Mehta. Sponsored by my oldest friend, Aleko Goulandris, I had the opportunity to study the maestro up close, dining and lunching with him, with a private rendition from *The Barber of Seville* by the great soprano Christina Poulitsi, a young woman who will go very far in the opera world. The maestro had studied with Dimitri Mitropoulos when he was a youngster — we are exactly the same age — and told me how the Greek would point at a score,

ask him to pick any page and Dimitri would know it by heart. Zubin also conducts without a score, and his suite from Ravel's ballet *Daphnis et Chloé* brought down the house. He also gave us Mozart, Tchaikovsky, von Weber, Rossini and Saint-Saëns. His wife, Nancy Kovack, was a very beautiful Hollywood actress back in the early Sixties, and she and I pulled the maestro's leg about our dates — innocent ones, alas, in El Morocco. Ah, those were the days.

But back to Athens. I left for good in 1994. I owned three houses and lots of land

Athenian life was slow and sweet, sunny and full of charm. But things ain't what they used to be

on the island of Zante. Most of them are now gone, sold, but I still have property in the Peloponnese. I knew everyone there was to know, and then some, and have kept all the friends who are still kicking. So it hurts when I see them as I now spend my time in New York and the Alps. We used to raise such hell and at times it felt as though we owned the place. Representing Greece in a couple of sports helped. Even the cops used to turn a blind eve to some of our shenanigans. Athenian life was slow and sweet, sunny and full of charm. No one worried about tomorrow. There was never a frenzied rush for anything; most of the time I was in a slow haze, dreaming of some Grecian maiden I had spotted in Kolonaki Square.

The memories remain. The only good thing about austerity is that no old buildings have been knocked down. Things have just got grubbier. During the concerts I sat with the Greek royal family, including King Constantine's sister, Queen Sofia of Spain. The King has written his memoirs, or how things really were, finally telling his side of the story. Excerpts from the book tripled

RADICALISATION
THE WARNING
SIGNS
JOHN
JOHN
JOHN

the circulation of the newspapers that carried them. The book is being translated into English and here is my proposal: King Constantine has agreed that I find him an English and American publisher. No one has a more interesting story to tell. King at 24 and married to the most beautiful princess in Europe, a coup-maker against the colonels on 13 December 1967, exiled after its failure, yet denied by opportunistic and lying politician his role as the first man to stand up to the military. And what a life he's had despite that major setback. As a young crown prince he staved with Eisenhower and de Gaulle, saw the Kennedys and LBJ up close, and knew every mover and shaker of his day, as they say. In the Rome Olympics in 1960 he won an Olympic gold medal in sailing.

The reason I am the intermediary for this book is that I volunteered. I can be contacted through *The Spectator*, as time is not of the essence. I hope that the *Speccie* doesn't mind me using its good offices. This is a very good book about a very interesting life.

Now it's back to Gstaad on a very small airplane that goes very fast.

To contact Taki, please email him c/o lucy@ spectator.co.uk

Low life *Jeremy Clarke*

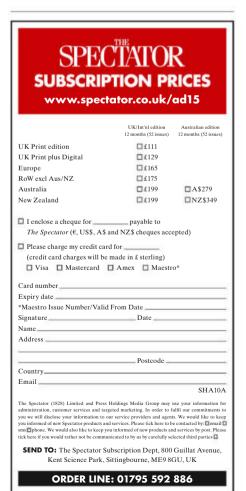


Denis was my guide to and from the new out-of-town Lidl superstore at Salernes in Provence. I drove. The road was a smooth ribbon of asphalt newly laid through an ancient forest of dwarf oaks. The in-car conversation with Denis was, as usual, easy and undogmatic and wide-ranging, which is the only sort of conversation I am capable of, for I can never remember what my opinions are, let alone which set of beliefs gave rise to them. In this uncommitted way we drifted aimlessly on a gentle swell until we bumped up against the subject of ghosts. I had never seen or heard or felt a ghost, I said. Neither had I met anvone who had. So no, I didn't believe in them. Denis had and did, however,

claiming to have frequented two houses that were quite definitely haunted.

He once rented a house in Hampshire and became friendly with a neighbouring family who lived in a very beautiful old house that was, in his words, 'haunted to buggery'. The husband was, among other things, a musician with an academic interest in medieval music. One day his son, who was then about nine or ten years old, sauntered into the house from the garden singing a quaint song, which his father recognised as an obscure old English folk song. He asked his boy to sing it again for him, which the boy did. 'Where on earth did you learn that?' said the flabbergasted father to the son. 'That friendly lad in the garden wearing funny clothes taught it to me,' said the boy.

One Sunday, the musician and his wife invited friends over for lunch at one o'clock. One o'clock came and went with no sign of their guests. At two o'clock they gave up waiting and started lunch without them. At three the musician rang the home of the missing couple to find out what had happened. They were in. The wife answered. 'We drove up to the house at ten to one,' she said, 'and there was such a colourful crowd in fancy dress on your lawn that we thought it was a children's party or something and that we'd got the wrong Sunday. So we turned around and came home.'



At Lidl we filled our trolley mainly with Lidl's own-brand gin at an incredible six euros a bottle. Coming back, Denis said, 'Would you like to see the first house I bought when I came to the area?' Under his directions we made a small diversion and parked at the foot of an unmade track, from where we could see a mansion perched on the side of a forested hill about half a mile away. The sight of it clearly moved him. I killed the engine and we sat in silence and stared at it. It seemed to me a gloomy-looking place. 'How old?' I said. 'Oh, not very,' he said. 'A hundred and fifty tops.' There followed another long, contemplative silence, punctuated by the spastic ticking of the cooling engine.

Then he said, 'And this is the other haunted house I've known. I remember the day my wife and I arrived. In the afternoon I took a walk in those woods and saw a magnificent stag standing not 50 yards away, looking at me, as I imagined, significantly. He was the only one I ever saw. I took him as a favourable, welcoming omen, which by and large he was.

'But there was a woman in Victorian clothing who would regularly appear in the kitchen then disappear through the wall. And one day I was working in the upstairs room that I used as a workshop when I heard the most awful, heart-rending scream - a woman's scream - which literally made the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end. My wife heard it too. A bit of local historical research showed that the house was a hunting lodge built in the late 19th century by a Marseilles banker. Tragically, a daughter suffered brain damage due to dehydration after falling asleep in the sun, and the banker kept her locked in the cupboard. The scream came from where the cupboard used to be before it was walled over. Of course we never breathed a word to anyone in case we ever wanted to sell the place. Yet in spite of the apparition and that horrible scream, the atmosphere of the house wasn't unhappy.'

That this Cambridge-educated former Special Branch officer (then cynical manipulator of the public mind as a television commercial producer) was a believer disturbed my disbelief not at all, however. Much more



'Quick, War and No Peace is on.'

fantastic to me than any spirit world, and relevant, was the huge amount of Lidl's ownbrand alcoholic spirit, at an incredible six euros a bottle, that we had clanking around in the boot of the car.

Real life Melissa Kite



If these speed awareness courses get much more entertaining and informative they might become a dangerous incentive to break the limit just to get on to them.

I qualified for my second one by doing 35 in a 30 at night in a strange place. Being lost and mercilessly tailgated as I crawled along a pitch dark country lane, I turned right to find a place to pull over and before I realised I was in a residential street, a camera flashed me.

Two months later, I was one of 23 people sitting in a faceless office suite inside a multistorey car park in Guildford with Janice, let's call her, in majestic command of a laser pointer and a PowerPoint display.

I looked around me and observed that my cohorts were the most boring, nerdy, garden edge-trimming, Jamie Oliver cookbook devotees I think I have ever seen. You couldn't have assembled a more diligent-looking bunch of tooth flossers if you had commissioned YouGov to find the 23 people least likely to do anything in any way threatening to the fabric of society.

'Here we all are,' I thought, as I surveyed this sorry bunch of nose-hair trimmers. 'The upstanding citizens of Middle Britain, happy to be caught on camera and done up like a kipper.'

When our great-great-grandchildren ask how the second dark age came about, their teachers will have to explain that their ancestors couldn't do much about civilisation unravelling because they were all detained in a National Speed Awareness Course at the time, sitting there with their vending-machine coffee cups, which they would later dispose of in the correct bin selected from a triumvirate of bins marked 'mixed recycling', 'plastics' and 'used cups'.

Anyway, Janice got cracking by putting a teaser on the PowerPoint. How many casualties were there and how many people did we think were killed on the roads each year?

We conferred in groups of four. 'It's much lower than you think,' I told my team mates, but they didn't believe me. 'Let's say two million injured and 25,000 killed,'

suggested the wide-eyed chap on my left. The other teams came up with even higher guesses. The true figures then appeared on the board: 194,477 casualties, 1,775 dead.

'What do you think of that?' said Janice, pacing in front of the PowerPoint.

A man in overalls bearing the name of a boiler repair firm piped up: 'Not bad!'

Janice balked. 'What do you mean?'

'Well, when you think of the millions on our roads, a thousand dead ain't bad.'

'It's bad for the families of those killed,' corrected Janice, her smartly bobbed hair bouncing indignantly. 'We want that figure to be?' 'Zero,' we all chirruped obediently.

And so off we went learning how to scour the roads for children about to jump out from hidden playgrounds, old ladies about to fall from parked cars and sparsely planted speed-limit signs — prompting the obvious question, 'Why are they so hard to spot?' The speed signs, I mean, not the old ladies.

Janice reckoned they can't just put repeater signs on lampposts to tell you it's a 30 limit. You get one sign, usually at a junction, then it's up to you to keep clocking the clues: street lights, houses, crossings, 'lollipop persons'.

I wanted to ask why they can't just put up lots of 30 signs, perhaps lighting them, so when I'm lost in a strange place at night I might see them. But I couldn't be bothered. There would be an answer. There was an answer for everything. And the more Janice gave the answers the less clear things were.

'This is a 20 zone. And this is a 20 limit. And this is a 20 guideline. If you're not doing 20 it's not illegal but if you do knock someone over and kill them doing more than 20 then you will get done for dangerous driving. Clear?' Oh yes, we nodded.

There were several rounds of 'spot the hazard' in which we were shown a picture of a street and had to shout out what could go wrong.

'Children playing ... parked cars ... heavy foliage...,' we each called out diligently, like the morons we were.

Then the man in overalls could bear it no longer: 'Cats and dogs! Men falling off ladders from roofs on to the top of your car as you drive past!'

I wanted to join in by shouting, 'Yes and the door of that parked van might burst open and jihadists leap out and spray the street with bullets!'

But of course neither Janice nor the powers that be were remotely interested in whether jihadists were going to leap out of a van

Not unless they could get them to sign up to a National Jihad Awareness Course costing £100 a few months later.

The turf Second thoughts Robin Oakley

Racing Life is all about judgment and I got one thing right at Cheltenham last Saturday after the overnight rain. Waved on to soggy grass by a parking attendant, I demurred, insisting that anyone who parked there would never drive off. I was waved on impatiently and foolishly let her win. When it came to leaving, I managed to start slithering across the grass towards safety, only for a 4 x 4 driving up the hard core to refuse to let me in. As I braked, I knew I was doomed. It must be something about being so high up that makes 4 x 4 drivers so arrogant but at least the arrival of the tractor 50 minutes later taught me where to find the bolt-on towbar for my car.

My assessment of the carpark going was the only thing I did get right on Festival Trials Day: in all seven races I managed to back the second. In the Triumph Hurdle Trial, I wavered between Paul Nicholls's Clan Des Obeaux and Nicky Henderson's Consul De Thaix. I went down the Nicholls route, only for Nicky to win with his other runner, the 25–1 Protek Des Flos. These French imports all seem to love the mud.



So do Venetia Williams's horses, so in the second I went for her Waldorf Salad. He was one of two who came clear of the field but was outgunned by Evan Williams's King's Odyssey in the blue and pink colours of Mr and Mrs William Rucker. From a point-to-point background, the Ruckers are true chasing folk. I regard hurdling just as a necessary evil,' William Rucker told me. But Trials day was already producing more fog than sunlight: by winning that race King's Odyssey had smoked himself out of his original target at the Festival, a novices' handicap. That did not worry his trainer; King's Odyssey cheered up a week that saw the stable down in the dumps. With Evan's stable jockey already out with a broken leg they lost a good horse in a fall that broke the collarbone of Adam Wedge, the

My assessment of the carpark was about the only thing I got right on Festival Trials Day

No. 2 at the yard who has been riding them in Paul Moloney's absence. Hailing 'a proper winter horse' who had relished the soft ground, Evan declared, 'If he never turned up anywhere in the spring it wouldn't worry Mr and Mrs Rucker or myself.' When someone mentioned the words 'Grand National' with regard to King's Odyssev's future he declared, 'You don't win those kinds of races if you keep rushing them to Cheltenham. I don't have to chase those buggers round here in March. I've got to earn my living for 12 months of the year.' He said he was lucky to have owners like the Ruckers; they are lucky to have a trainer with perspective.

By the time you read this, I will be on a cruise ship somewhere between Peru and Tahiti — someone has to do these things — giving talks about politics and racing. A parallel I often draw is that between racing folk and the parachute commander who was

asked at his retirement party what it was he loved about jumping out of planes. 'I hate jumping out of planes,' he replied. 'It makes me sick to the stomach. I just love being with the kind of people who do like jumping out of planes.' The sheer good fellowship of jumping was in evidence once again as my selection, the Grand National winner Many Clouds, and Hennessy Gold Cup winner Smad Place came clear in the Bet-Bright Trial Chase. Many Clouds had won the race last year, with Smad Place second. This time it was the other way round, but the first man with a congratulatory arm around King's shoulders was Many Clouds trainer Oliver Sherwood, who added a cheery cry of '15 all'. As a Gold Cup trial, though, there was more fog. Alan King declared himself more confused than ever over whether to run Smad Place in the Gold Cup while the co-favourite for that race, Willie Mullins's Djakadam, fell at the tenth.

I never know quite what makes horses like particular courses. Perhaps it is a bit like humans who return to holiday destinations, but horses that run well at Cheltenham often defy their form to repeat the feat. Annacotty had won the Paddy Power Gold Cup at the Gloucestershire venue in the autumn but lacked sparkle last time out so I sided with Venetia Williams's Tenor Nivernais. Again the two came 30 lengths clear of the field, but it was of course Annacotty who won the thrilling duel. Again, though, the winner will probably now be weighted out of what would have been his best Festival target.

The next two races, however, did give us Festival pointers. Thistlecrack, the best-looking jumper in training, demolished his field in the Cleeve Hurdle and is a banker for the World Hurdle and Alan King's Yanworth did the same in beating Shantou Village, one of this column's Twelve to Follow, by seven lengths in the novices' hurdle. Back them both in March.

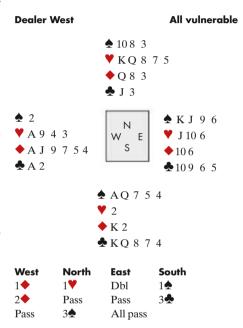


'Don't worry, it's only a Twitterstorm — it'll blow over in no time.'

BridgeJanet de Botton

The Brits have done brilliantly in Icelandair's annual bridge festival in Reykjavik and this year was no different. The winners of the two-day pairs tournament were the Anglo-Bulgarian partnership of Rumen Trendafilov, who has played many times on the Bulgarian Open team, and Nevena Senior, who has won two World Championships (among many other titles) playing on the English Ladies Team.

On today's deal, Rumen played carefully and accurately to land his spade partscore.



West led Ace and another diamond to declarer's King. East's double had shown precisely four spades, which cleared up the distribution of the trump suit. At trick three Rumen led a low spade to the ten, losing to the Jack. Back came a club, West winning the ace and returning the two to dummy's Jack. Rumen led the ♠8 to the nine and Queen and now needed to find a second entry to dummy to finesse again in spades.

The only way that declarer can get to dummy under his own steam is to ruff a club, but then there would be no trump left to lead for the finesse, so he had to enlist the aid of the defence. He cashed the ♣King, necessary if the suit was dividing three—three as this would extract West's club exit card, and then led his heart. West won the ace but, down to nothing but red cards, had no option but to present the lead to dummy. When he did so, Rumen could lead the three of spades to his seven, cash the ace of spades to draw the last trump, and claim the remainder, making nine tricks for + 140 and an almost 80 per cent score on the board.

Pretty classy play.

SPECTATOR WINE JONATHAN RAY



ell, that's January done and dusted. Phew! An immense relief, I'm sure, for all those clinging to the wagon by their fingertips. But pity the poor souls about to give up booze for Lent; it starts this coming Wednesday (10 February) and goes on all the way till 24 March.

Best get some decent wine in, then, and put a spring back in our step. And for those noble folk about to board the Lenten water wagon, why not give yourself something to look forward to in glorious, daffodildappled April?

Mark Cronshaw of The Wine Company heeded my plea for something cheering and presented a fine selection for us this week, one that I have whittled down to a particularly toothsome half-dozen. Not only that, Mark has been especially generous with the discounts (there's a full £2.24 a bottle off one of the wines) and every bottle is under a tenner, with the mixed case an upbeat £109 (down from £126.88).

First, the 2013 Bourgogne Chardonnay (1). Made by the excellent Vignerons de Buxy — an 80-year-old collaboration of 120 Burgundian families — from grapes grown in Montagny, it's a beauty. It's fresh and instantly appealing on the palate, with soft, creamy orchard fruit and whispers of honeysuckle, citrus and spice. It really is impressive and could well pass for a grander 'village' or even a Premier Cru. £9.75 down from £10.99.

The 2014 Sauvignon Blanc, 'Les Mariés', Domaine de la Baume (2), comes in a heavy and really rather handsome bottle that hints at something rather grander than the modest price The Wine Company is asking. Made in the heart of the Languedoc at the 200-year-old Domaine de la Baume, it won the gold medal at the 2015 Concours des Grands Vins du Languedoc-Roussillon, and deservedly so. It's vibrant, crisp and racy, with plenty of grapefruit and lime flavours and, thanks to the hotter climes here than the Loire or Bordeaux, there's even an elusive tropical note. Delicious. £8.75 down from £10.99.

The 2014 Château Teulon (3) is a simple but immensely satisfying Syrah/Grenache blend from the Costières de Nîmes. The estate has been in the Teulon family for seven generations and was recently certified as organic. The wine is a Rhône in all but name (and price), with plenty of dark-berry

fruit, spice and a meaty finish. Great value at £7.50, down from £8.49.

If you prefer your Syrahs unblended and a touch more intense and concentrated, then you'll love the 2014 Syrah 'La Jeunesse', Domaine de la Baume (4). Shut your eyes and you could be drinking a Crozes-

The Wine Company heeded my plea for something cheering and presented a fine selection

Hermitage or even an Hermitage itself. It's a big, bold wine for sure, with no shortage of pepper and spice underpinning the warm, inviting, dark plum, damson and prunes. Although it's absolutely ready to drink, I'd favour tucking it away for a month or so and bringing it out for the summer barbecue. £9.25, down from £10.99.

The 2012 Rioja Crianza, Sancho Garcés, Bodegas Patrocinio (5), from Rioja Alta, is quintessential Rioja made from 100 per cent Tempranillo aged for a year in American oak and then in bottle for a further six months before release. It's rounded, smooth and supple with elegant red fruit and just a hint of vanilla and a gentle, palate-pleasing touch of ripe sweetness on the finish. It's wonderfully accessible and just £9.50, down from £10.99.

Finally, the deliciously seductive 2013 Millefiori Rosso del Veneto (6) from northern Italy. Made from a blend of 30-year-old Corvina and Merlot grapes, a large proportion of which were dried for two months before crushing (the so-called 'appassimento' process), it has a remarkable depth of flavour hard to take in on first sip. There are hints of cherries, plums and mulberries along with vanilla, coffee and chocolate — and it makes for one deliciously heady and complex glass of wine. Top drawer! £9.50 down from £10.99.

The sample case has two bottles of each wine and delivery, as ever, is free.

ORDER FORM Spectator Wine Offer

www.spectator.co.uk/wineclub

The Wine Company, Park Lane Business Centre, Langham, Colchester, Essex CO4 5WR Tel: 01206 713560 Email: sales@thewinecompany.co.uk

Prices in	for	rm are per case of 12	List price	Club price No.
White	1	2013 Bourgogne Chardonnay, Buxy, 12.5%	£131.88	£117.00
	2	2014 Sauvignon Blanc, Dme de la Baume, 13.5%	£131.88	£105.00
Red	3	2014 Ch. Teulon, Costières de Nîmes, 13.5%	£101.88	£90.00
	4	2014 Syrah, Dme de la Baume, 14.5%	£131.88	£111.00
	5	2012 Rioja Crianza, Sancho Garcés, Patrocinio, 14%	£131.88	£114.00
***************************************	6	2013 Millefiori Rosso del Veneto, 14%	£131.88	£114.00
Mixed	7	Sample case, two each of the above	£126.88	£109.00

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Prices include VAT and delivery on the British mainland. Payment should be made either by cheque with the order, payable to The Wine Company, or by debit or credit card, details of which may be telephoned or faxed. This offer, which is subject to availability, closes on 31 March 2016.

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Chess

Irresistible force

Raymond Keene

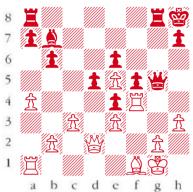
Alexander Alekhine was one of the immortals of the chessboard — world champion from 1927, when in an epic war of attrition at Buenos Aires 1927 he had wrested the championship from Capablanca, until 1935, and again from 1937 until his death in 1946. His victories at the tournaments of San Remo 1930 and Bled 1931 number among the most devastating performances in the history of the game. The historic table and pieces, with which the two titans fought their battles, is a prime treasure of the Buenos Aires chess club.

Alekhine's forte was the whirlwind attack. His onslaughts were not always fully correct, but the force of his offensives was so intense that opponents tended to buckle under the psychological pressure and burden of analytical calculation, which Alekhine's fierce will imposed. The following notes are based on those in a new book, *Alekhine: Move by Move* by Steve Giddins (Everyman Chess).

Rubinstein-Alekhine: Dresden 1926, London System

1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 e6 3 Bf4 b6 4 h3 Bb7 5 **Nbd2 Bd6** A typically creative Alekhine idea. Taking advantage of the specifics of the position, in this case the inclusion of an early h2-h3, he produces an unusual response. 6 Bxd6 cxd6 7 e3 0-0 8 Be2 d5 9 0-0 Nc6 10 c3 Ne4 11 Nxe4 dxe4 12 Nd2 f5 It soon becomes clear that Rubinstein is in too passive a state of mind, and he rapidly drifts into trouble. 13 f4 g5 14 Nc4 d5 15 Ne5 Nxe5 16 dxe5 Kh8 17 a4 Rubinstein at last starts some active play on the queenside, but Alekhine condemns this move and says White had to seize his last chance to play 17 g3 Rg8 18 Kh2. After the text, that will no longer be possible. 17 ... Rg8 18 Qd2 gxf4 19 Rxf4 **Qg5 20 Bf1** (see diagram 1) **20 ... Qg3** This is a subtle way to gain a tempo, as will become clear. 21 Kh1 Forced, since 21 ... Qxh3 was an obvious threat. 21 ... Qg7 The king will soon be required on g1, so Kh1 will actually prove to be a lost tempo. 22 Qd4 Ba6 23 Rf2 Qg3 24 Rc2 Bxf1 25 Rxf1 Rac8 Alekhine is relentless in his exploitation of the initiative. As he himself says, Black works with tempo gains the whole time. Now he threatens to win the a-pawn with ... Rc4.





26 b3 Rc7 27 Re2 Rcg7 28 Rf4 Rc7 29 Rc2 Rcg7 30 Re2

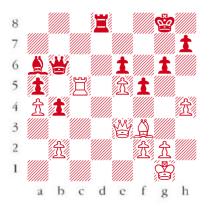


30 ... Rg6 Alekhine's play nicely combines attacks on all of White's weaknesses — including, vitally, the e5-pawn. His immediate threat is 31 ... Rh6 32 Qd1 Qg7 33 Qd4? Rxh3+! and wins. In fact, the more one looks at the position, the more one realises that White is virtually in zugzwang. For example, the e2-rook cannot move because of 31 Rc2 (or 31 Ref2 Rh6) 31 ... Qe1+ 32 Kh2 Rh6 and there is no defence to 33 ... Rxh3+. **31 Qb4 Rh6** There is no defence to ... Rxh3+, so White has to surrender a pawn. **32 h4 Qg7** Naturally, 32 ... Rxh4+ was also winning. **33 c4 Rg6 34 Qd2 Rg3 35 Qe1 Rxg2 White resigns** Mate follows rapidly.

PUZZLE NO. 394

White to play. This position is from Alekhine-Flohr, Bled 1931. White has a positional advantage but can you spot the crushing tactical blow? Answers to me at The Spectator by Tuesday 9 February or via email to victoria@ spectator.co.uk or by fax on 020 7681 3773. There is a prize of £20 for the first correct answer out of a hat. Please include a postal address and allow six weeks for prize delivery.

Last week's solution 1 Rxf7 Last week's winner Robert Lee, Hampton, Middlesex



Competition Woe is me Lucy Vickery

In Competition No. 2933 you were invited to submit a blurb for a misery memoir. Thanks to Tom Dulake for suggesting this excellent challenge. The winners would be worthy occupants of what some bookshops call the 'Painful Lives' section, which service the reading public's appetite for ever more harrowing accounts of extreme suffering. Unsure whether to congratulate or commiserate with the miserabilists below, I award the bonus fiver to W.J.Webster; the rest take £25 each.

Slow Drags the Harrow is Len Sprague's fearless account of a life survived through sheer unvielding endurance. When he was seven his mother was convicted of poisoning his brutally sadistic father. Sent to live with his widowed Aunt Myrah he often went without food as she tried to 'starve out the Devil in him'. He left school at 15 and earned money running drugs for a paedophiliac urban gangmaster. Eventually he escaped by walking to Tilbury and stowing away on a Patagonian cargo ship. He kept himself alive by eating rats and drinking bilgewater. But once in South America his journey to redemption began. All this is told in spare yet unsparing prose as an ultimately heartwarming hymn to the indomitable human spirit. To read Slow Drags the Harrow is to take a virtual round-trip to Hell with a faithful guide at your side. W.J. Webster

The author, son of unmarried carnival workers, was born in a decrepit but brightly painted van at a roadside campground in Kentucky. After both parents went to prison on fraud and arson charges, he got a rough-and-ready upbringing from assorted magicians, fortune-tellers, knife-throwers, jugglers, drug dealers, pickpockets, merry-go-round operators and other carnies and hangers-on. Then the competing jailhouse conversion experiences of his mother and father set the stage for a cultversus-cult custody battle pitting renegade Mormon polygamists against a nude Scientology commune. In his teens he broke with both parents, and established himself as the charismatic leader of a secretive urban fellowship where young runaways dabbled in self-dismemberment and cannibalism. As he writes in this shocking but ultimately uplifting saga of degradation, criminality and eventual self-discovery, 'Luckily, I got over that mutilation kick while I still had enough fingers left to type this book.' Luckily indeed. Chris O'Carroll

Steven Glum's *Please, Daddy, Don't Stick My Other Hand in the Food Processor Too* is a memoir that plumbs hitherto undreamed of depths of privation and cruelty. Tut as you read how Glum's junkie mother gave birth to him in a dustbin full of broken glass, used bandages and diarrhoeic rats. Go 'Blimey, that's a bit much' as he reveals how his psychopathic father once beat him until his pelvis fell out. Gasp as you hear how he was saved from childhood starvation only by the chance discovery of a hypodermic needle floating in a public lavatory, which he then used to chisel bits of chewing gum off the pavement. Sob uncontrollably as he describes how he didn't even know what colour the Incredible Hulk was until 1982 when

his parents finally replaced the family's black and white TV.

Rob Stuart

In Is Mommy Still Dead? Krystal Washington, Utah's top television jewellery shopping host, unsparingly reveals the tear-stained history behind her smile. Both loving portrait of the Mommy who died bearing her and damning indictment of the Daddy who neglected to be there for her almost as comprehensively, the book shows how hope can trump despair and insurmountable odds can be surmounted, though not before countless searing anecdotes, from being forced to eat dog food to merciless bullying by truant officers uncomprehending of her phobia of bullies. Only inspired to speak by a neighbour's toucan, garnering her education from infomercials and the backs of beer cans, Krystal had determination where others had only opportunity. Her eventual triumph, selling ersatz zirconium through the medium she loved, would prove almost as hard earned as the love of the children she would unintentionally ruin by giving them all she never had and more besides. Adrian Fry

He never had a chance. Born in middle-class Surrey to loving parents who never put him up for adoption, 'Jeremy' suffered the indignity of education at a series of schools dubbed outstanding by Ofsted, where he was not bullied. In painstaking detail the author relates his time at Oxford, where he made the mistake of working hard to achieve a respectable and solid Upper Second. Then it was the Civil Service, marriage, children, and the long depressing upward drift to the rank of Permanent Secretary. The world deemed him successful, but his soul yearned to play grunge metal. Looking back on a wasted life, 'Jeremy' dissects his mistakes with bitter honesty, starting with a fatal decision at the age of six to learn oboe rather than guitar. An especially gruelling chapter describes the evening in the Nineties when he was offered hard drugs and said, 'No thanks, actually. Sorry.' George Simmers

In High Pitch, Theophilus Pottle (his real name) coolly shows us the underbelly of luck. Born to a homicidal mother, he witnessed the slaughter of his siblings when he was only one, and was spared so that she 'had something to look at'. After spending his adolescence in a glass case, cruelly required to speak the time in the 24-hour format, Pottle was fortunate to be rescued by a group of itinerant eunuchs, who made their living by hiring themselves out to local choirs. There was just one snag... Pottle, who made his name with Punishment Beating, an account of his previous life as a cinema commissionaire in Stockton-on-Tees, surpasses all expectation and fear as he depicts his escape from being a vocal rentboy into the equally disturbing world of fell cricket in Cumbria. Never has the term 'losing the toss' been so vicious, dangerous and excruciating. Bill Greenwell

NO. 2936: COUNTRY MUSIC

Tom Shakespeare has suggested that it might be time for the UK to consider an alternative to 'God Save the Queen'. You are invited to suggest lyrics for a new British national anthem (16 lines max). Email entries to lucy@spectator.co.uk by midday on 17 February.

Crossword 2246: Where's Maggie? by Dumpynose

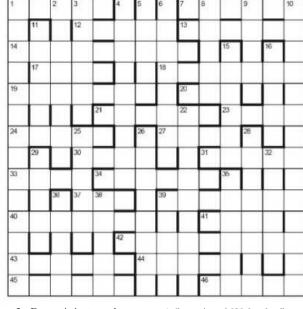
Unclued lights (including one of two words and three pairs, 37 doing double duty) are characters in a play. A representation (fourteen letters) of its title appears in the completed grid and must be shaded.

Across

- 12 Short of money Rameau composed airs (5)
- 13 Understanding uni, long historic, admitting pupil teacher (6)
- 14 Conically roofed edifice on Australian street beside pub (9, two words)
- 17 Let rip! (4)
- 18 One of the poorest nabs a base prisoner (7)
- 19 Ancient city square \(\frac{5}{8} \) of vehicles avoided (7)
- 21 Old chandler has bit of a kip in maple tree (6)
- 23 Tango with aged pair from Perth (4)
- 24 State of Juno's priestess pierced by heavy knife (5)
- 27 Medicine box belonging to gypsy man (not madam) (4)30 Defer to Buckeye State
- governor (4) 31 Suppose blue holds record?
- (5)
 33 Former surrealist renounces
- November (4)
 34 Speak highly of puff with
- jam (6) 39 Lord of sound, one famous
- in 8 (7)
 40 Black horse no good in city
- (7)
 42 Dark liquid, popular neat,
 Scotsman swallowed
 (9, two words)
- 43 Foolish person's life (6)
- 44 Deck party bores active sailors (5)
- 46 Grace Darling's evergreen (5)

Down

1 Creative energy nine ignore in great prosthetist's work (14)



- 2 Dramatist's stomach problem Annie eased (8)
- 3 Dude switched reed for labiate plant (6)4 Tom and Dick, rowdy dandy
- escorted (9)
 6 Neronian VIP dies nastily
- outside Congo's capital (8)
- 8 Drama over by afternoon (5)
- 9 Furniture not quite PC? (5)
- 11 Pair of armies in struggle had disagreed (6)
- 15 Grass contains piggies (6)
- 16 Plant from Kew, admirer pulled up for wife (5)
- No protein aggravated eye problem (9)
- 25 Breeding ground producing fresh oysters? (6)
- 26 Rocking party animal missing air involving drums (8)
- 28 Unreserved judgment's freedom from bias (8, two words)
- 29 Rug acquired by an Indo-European (5)
- 32 Silver miner ultimately goes in with lamp (6)
- 35 Lass two princesses meet (6)
- 36 Moulding in Kosovo loggia (5)
- 38 Sound of motor racing is music (5)

A first prize of £30 for the first correct solution opened on 22 February. There are two runners-up prizes of £20. (UK solvers can choose to receive the latest edition of the *Chambers* dictionary instead of cash — ring the word 'dictionary'.) Entries to: Crossword 2246, The Spectator, 22 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP. Please allow six weeks for prize delivery.

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SOLUTION TO 2243: OBIT III

WARREN MITCHELL (42/43), STAR (39) of stage and screen, died on 14th November 2015. He won an Olivier Award as Willy LOMAN (25) in DEATH OF A SALESMAN (18A/16) and a BAFTA TV Award as Alf Garnett in TILL DEATH US DO PART (10/18A/15). ALF GARNETT (diagonally from the first row) was to be shaded

First prize Michael Moran, Penrith, Cumbria Runners-up Dr Simon Shaw, Goosnargh, Lancs; Cathy Staveley, London SW15

Status Anxiety

Why does no one speak up for poor white boys? *Toby Young*

avid Cameron can be a frustrating figure at times. He wrote an article for the Sunday Times this week in which he drew attention to the under-representation of disadvantaged students in Britain's universities, which he was quite right to do. But he is wrong about the ethnicity of those students and wrong about where the problem lies. It's working-class white boys who fare the worst, not black boys, and when it comes to broadening access, the track record of our tertiary education sector is pretty good. It's state schools that could be doing more.

First, a few facts. If you broaden the definition of non-white Britons to encompass all ethnic minorities, including British Asians, they're significantly more likely to go to university than white Britons, according to an Institute of Fiscal Studies report published last year. That report found that Chinese pupils in the lowest socioeconomic quintile are 10 per cent more likely to go to university than white British pupils in the highest quintile. The weakest performers are not black pupils, but white Britons in the lowest quintile. They're 10 per cent less likely to participate in higher education than any other ethnic group.

Overall, 20 per cent of British students at UK universities are BME (black or minority ethnic), which is significantly higher than the percentage



According to a report published last year, poor white boys are the lowest achieving group in Britain

of the population that's BME -13per cent, according to the 2011 Census. The figure for Russell Group universities is marginally lower — 18 per cent — and Oxford lower still, at around 14 per cent. But that figure is the same as the Russell Group average if you strip out London universities. True, black students are under-represented at Oxford and the success rate of black applicants is below average, but that's largely because so few apply — only 281 last year, out of 11,729 applicants in total. And those who do tend to apply for the most oversubscribed subjects like law, medicine and PPE.

Oxford spends over £6 million a year on outreach programmes targeted at disadvantaged groups, and the university takes contextual data into account — such as the quality of school the applicant goes to — when deciding whom to interview and whom to make offers to. But the university doesn't flag applicants' ethnicity, partly because that's legally problematic. Having said that, there's no evidence that BME students are under-represented among the 10 per cent of British Oxford undergraduates from the most disadvantaged households. On the contrary, they're over-represented. It's white boys from these households who are almost unheard of at Oxford.

The same is true of Cambridge. I appeared on *Channel 4 News* earlier this week to discuss this issue and a Cambridge graduate called Tony emailed me to say that in the three years he spent there, he never met a single white working-class student. 'I am from Bermondsey and I never met one student at Cambridge who was authentically working- class,' he wrote. That's anecdotal, but it's borne out by other stories I've been told by

the handful of white working-class boys who've made it to Oxbridge.

According to a report published last year by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, poor white boys are the lowest-achieving group in Britain, with just 28 per cent getting five GCSEs at grade C or above, including English and maths, in 2013. That was lower than poor Pakistani boys and poor black Caribbean boys (who were, until recently, the worst performers). By contrast, 74 per cent of Chinese boys on free school meals hit that target, and poor Chinese girls are the highest-achieving group in Britain.

The Prime Minister talked about 'ingrained, institutional and insidious' attitudes being partly responsible for the under-representation of disadvantaged groups at top universities, but if he meant racism directed at non-whites, he is mistaken. Inverse racism, whereby academics interviewing applicants from deprived backgrounds are more likely to be favourably disposed towards non-whites than whites, may be closer to the mark.

The real problem, though, is that poor white boys underachieve at school from the age of four onwards. There are lots of reasons for this and most are beyond the scope of the state to do much about, but schools could be doing more. What's needed is a co-ordinated effort by the Department for Education, local authorities, academy groups and school leaders to raise the attainment of this group. Plenty of powerful people speak up for black boys, now including the Prime Minister. No one speaks up for poor white boys.

Toby Young is associate editor of The Spectator.

MICHAEL HEATH



Spectator Sport Don't cry for John Terry Roger Alton

ust when you were thinking that the Premier League had become a much nicer place without José Mourinho in it, here comes another old friend from Stamford Bridge who can be relied on to pollute the atmosphere. Yes, it's John Terry again, JT, Captain, Leader, Legend, who issued a tear-stained farewell saving Chelsea didn't want him any more (sob), it couldn't be a fairytale ending (sob), and he wasn't going to retire at Chelsea (hysterical weeping). But so loyal was he that he couldn't possibly be going to another Premier League club (stately music and solemn applause). Oh please, what a load of tosh. This was Terry, in his inimitable way, stitching up his club by bringing pressure to bear for his new contract, which Chelsea have yet to specifically decline and would probably have offered anyway, except now they would have to do so on wildly better terms and under public pressure.

Forget America or the Middle East; personally I think Terry will be off to China. His old team-mate, the 28-year-old Brazilian midfielder Ram-



Say what you like about JT, he can see a good deal a mile off

ires, signed the other day for Jiangsu Suning, which is based in Nanjing and is as ambitious as hell. The fee was £25 million and he will be on at least £200,000 a week. Terry's old pal Didier Drogba had a contract worth £216,000 a week. The word is that Terry could be clearing around a cool £20 million a year, wherever he ends up. Not bad for the end of your career.

Say what you like about JT, he can see a good deal a mile off. Chinese culture is obsessed with luxury products and world football stars are the ultimate status symbol. It looks like JT, who was always a master of positional play, has positioned himself perfectly for a large slice of the Chinese cake. And he gets to see the pandas too.

Good for Pep Guardiola, off to Manchester City with the most gilded reputation in football coaching. His status and Sheikh Mansour's billions should be enough to coax the best players in the world to the Etihad: 'Taxi to Wilmslow for Mr Messi, please.' But if City win the league this season without Kompany, with De Bruyne out for months and Agüero and Silva out for long periods that will be an epic feat of management by Manuel Pellegrini. He's a good guy too.

How great could Andy Murray have been if he played in another era? Federer has 17 grand slams, Rafa 14, and Djokovic now 11. Between them they have won 38 of the past 44 majors (two for Murray and Stan Wawrinka;

one each for Del Potro and Čilić). Murray's record at the Australian Open is five finals, no titles; he has been to nine Grand Slam finals and been knocked out nine times in semi-finals. His consistency is astonishing, even more than his ability to chunter at his coach between every point. Is he our greatest ever sportsman? Steve Redgrave and Chris Hoy may disagree but there aren't many other contenders: Jonny Wilkinson; A.P. McCoy; Sir Bradley? Andy is a man alone.

Not long to wait now before the Six Nations, always a winter treat, though now several levels below the southern hemisphere Rugby Championship. Still, here's a humble wish list: it would be nice to see hookers hook at last; I want England to play like Japan, which would make them New Zealand; I love France and French rugby but I wouldn't mind seeing them come last so that they realise that great clubs don't make a great national side; I would like to see Scotland win three games. I would like the RFU to get their heads round the fact that sport is international and let mischievous Eddie Jones pick anyone English, wherever they play. I would like to see tries being scored, great three-quarter moves, brave calls and end this Six Nations feeling like it really is the finishing school for next year's Lions team that can wipe the smug smile off the face of the greatest world champions there ever were.

DEAR MARY YOUR PROBLEMS SOLVED



Q. My husband-to-be and I both work full time. We are getting married from his family HQ and his kind mother has effectively done all the planning. She's done it all with superb taste and efficiency so I am loath to be critical about the one thing I don't like. She has ordered laminated name badges for all the guests, to be handed to them as they arrive at the reception, and is adamant they must be worn. She says they will help the elderly guests, but these make up only a tiny percentage: most are in their

twenties or thirties. Do you agree that name badges would give an unromantic corporate flavour to our wedding reception? How can we overrule her with tact?

Name withheld, London SW10

A. Your concern is misguided. Parties go with a much greater swing when anxiety about who people are is removed. It is not only the elderly who have forgotten; the middle-aged are also grateful to be reminded. Moreover, if a number of your guests are in their twenties then some will be single. Badges will provide a useful shortcut when they want to inquire about the romantic status of someone who has taken their fancy.

Q. My son and daughter-inlaw have a new puppy they are desperately trying to train. Their neighbours have dogs, too, and they all like to play together. However, the neighbours not only let the puppy into the house and on to sofas, but also feed him. My son and his wife have politely requested that the neighbours don't let the puppy inside and don't feed him — to which their cheery response is that they can't understand how he got in or how he came upon an entire tin of Pedigree Chum, etc. Can you suggest how to warn the neighbours off without causing undue offence?

- J.R., Devizes, Wiltshire

A. There is only a small window when the puppy can have good habits ingrained. When rival values compete in the world of toddlers, the 'good' parents sidestep the difficulty by inviting the undisciplined toddler to their house on play dates. In this way

they can control junk food, screen time etc, while remaining on friendly terms with the 'bad' child's parents. Why not follow their lead and host all the play dates? Issue the invitations with warmth and enthusiasm to counter chippiness.

Q. I was taken aback when a family friend, a widower 40 years older, who sat next to me at dinner, confided that it would soon be 'our time', i.e. that he and I would get together. Fortunately someone interrupted before I could reply. How does one gently rebuff such an overture without humiliating or misleading the dear old codger?

- Name and address withheld

A. If you are sure his overture will not become physical, keep his spirits up by replying 'Well you never know...'

Food Past Caring Tanya Gold



e Caprice is a monochrome patch of the 1980s behind the Ritz Hotel, in the part of St James's that looks like Monaco. (There is a car park.) It was, along with Langham's and the Ivy, the most fashionable restaurant of the Thatcher years, beloved of media slags and wankers; also of Princess Diana (the night after she died, her table was kept empty, which is a unique elegy), Princess Margaret, Mick Jagger and Jeffrey Archer, who ate his first meal here after he left prison, because he too is unique.

Even so, Le Caprice, now 35, the age at which the pragmatic woman becomes a feminist, cannot compete with the monstrous exhibitionism of the new super-restaurants, specifically Novikov and Sexy Fish, which is, in a restaurant-themed retelling of the Cain-and-Abel myth (the Bible, not the Jeffrey Archer novel) also owned by Richard Caring. It's too subtle, and look around: this is not a subtle age. But should it clad itself in gold, and buy taps made of diamonds, and employ a hot nude sous chef who is then photographed for ES magazine, it

It's the Sunset Boulevard of restaurants: 'I'm big, it's the salmon fishcake that

got small'

would lose its identity. (A good restaurant is like a good newspaper; it knows who it is.) So what can it do, this restaurant of naff ghosts?

It can, for instance, embark on a journey of self-mythology. (Four years ago it introduced brunch, which was not so dramatic.) And so, to celebrate its 35th birthday, and to evoke 'those hazy, lazy, crazy days... bang-bang chicken, eggs Arlington, *that* salmon fishcake', it has created a £35 Classic Caprice Menu, with a glass of champagne for £3.50, which was the price in 1981. I think I remember that crisps were 7p then; but I grew up in Norbiton. And — this is the copywriter in me—can you be lazy and crazy? Doesn't that simply mean high on marijuana?

So, to Arlington Street, at 6 p.m., which is the last slot for the Classic Menu; come later and it is à la carte, with a gun to your head. There are blazing fires outside, and a doorman in a bowler hat. We are 30 minutes late; the response is both polite and rude. 'The Golds?' says a man of impeccable smoothness, as if I have not been to a

restaurant before and need to have it explained to me: 'Sit down, we'll give you some food and then you leave.'

This then, is an interesting place, in that it was once filled with people gossip columnists considered interesting. But they are dead, or dying; and so is their café. It clings on, grimly, with the Caring money; it is well polished, with cream flowers suspended from the ceiling. The ladies' loo is blazing white, like the face of God in a bad film. (A reports the men's loo is black; ah, the Janus face of gender!) Otherwise, the world has moved on; now it is just me, the staff, and some children wearing massive headphones and staring at iPads, as if they know, even at seven, that reality is not for them. There are no wracked celebrities; there are no voids dedicated to wracked, and absent, celebrities; there are no celebrities. Le Caprice now feels like a practised but provincial restaurant; that is, the Sunset Boulevard of restaurants: 'I am big, it's that salmon fishcake that got small.' I do not mind this. Ennui is my second favourite emotion.

The food, though, is somehow lifeless. The famous bang-bang chicken is cold chicken doused in peanut sauce, and chilly; eggs Arlington are eggs Benedict with smoked salmon; the lamb hotpot is tough, with absurdly delicate potatoes, two dishes at war; the risotto is not joyful, just OK; the cappuccino crème brûlée is almost inedible; the sticky toffee pudding is excellent.

But otherwise there is nothing here: just ghosts.

Le Caprice, Arlington Street, London SW1A 1RJ, tel: 020 7629 2239.



'It's a new drone for campaigns that require boots on the ground.'

MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

Not even a thing

Last summer Kim Kardashian, who already had a daughter called North (surname West), announced that she was expecting a boy. She put a photograph on Twitter of herself pouting, captioning it: 'Pregnancy lips'. Some Twitter-followers asked: 'Pregnancy lips? Is that even a thing?'

The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary has since adopted that example as the locus classicus of the phrase Is that even a thing?, and variants such as Is that a thing? or That's not a thing.

Professor Ben Yagoda of the University of Delaware has poked around on the internet



and found, like other people, the phrase being used in 2001, in a television situation comedy called *That '70s Show.* In it, Donna says: 'You guys ought to get a mascot... a big, green, furry loser!' In reply, Eric says: 'That's not even a thing.'

Thing has been very adaptable in English in its 1,200-year history. Like 'That's not even a thing', one construction that is meant humorously has been with us for the past 50 years and produces sentences such as: 'It's

a Florida thing, you wouldn't understand.'

But at the heart of thingsomeness is the notion of an entity. (The word thingsomeness was coined by Nathaniel Fairfax in his Treatise of the Bulk and Selvedge of the World, published in 1674. Fairfax eschewed borrowings from learned languages, though I don't find that his native neologisms make his thoughts on the nature of time and space any easier to follow.)

In its basic sense, Alfred the Great happily deployed *thing* in his translation of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*. Taking qualities such as power,

glory and honour, he writes, when these things are collected together, they are all one thing, and that one thing is God: *Thonne bith hit eall an thing, & thæt an thing bith God.*

Our fashionable new phrase is clearly equivalent to *I don't believe there's any such thing*. When in *Alice in Wonderland*, the Dormouse tells a story about Elsie, Lacie, and Tillie, who lived at the bottom of a treacle well, Alice begins angrily: 'There's no such thing!' In current parlance, she would have exclaimed instead: 'A treacle well! That's not even a thing.'

- Dot Wordsworth





The Spectator Wine School

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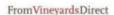
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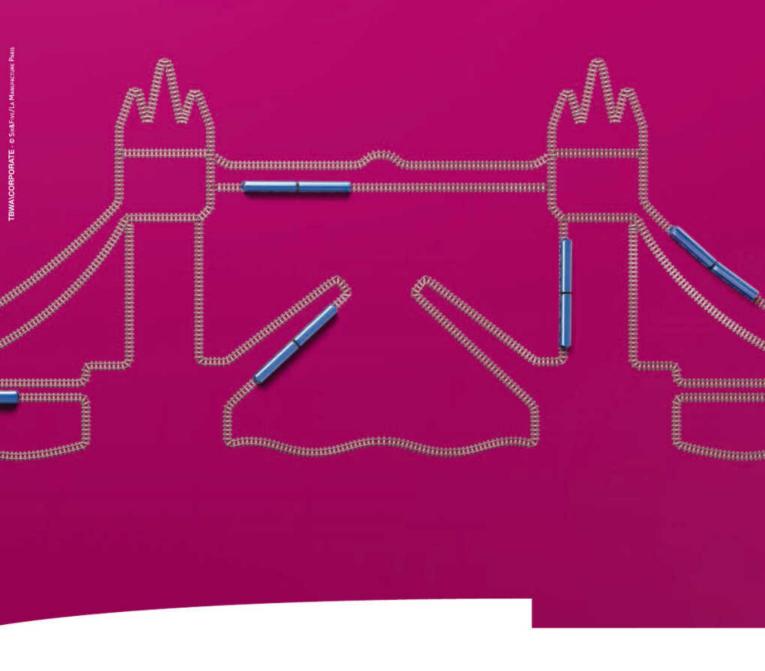
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